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ALMACK'S.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY S. AND R. BENTLEY, DORSET STREET.

ALMACK'S

A NOVEL.

"Nothing extenuate, nor set down aught in malice."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

Charles White

VOL. III.

LONDON:
SAUNDERS AND OTLEY,
PUBLIC LIBRARY, CONDUIT STREET.
1826.

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ALMACK'S.

CHAPTER I.

THE OFFICIAL APPOINTMENT.

Leicester. Then are we all resolved?
All. We are all resolved.
Leicester. All?
All. All.
Dangle. Nem. con. egad!
Puff. Oh! yes, when *Patronesses* do agree, their unanimity is wonderful. CRITIC.

AFTER all, there certainly is nothing like the heroic comical style! it is so convenient; exalting what is humble, and giving consequence to what is very common. And is not this, good reader, what we are all trying to do every hour of our lives? To begin, then, sublimely—

"Sol through white curtains shot a timorous ray;"

130476

which is simply to tell you, that the sun, like a true London sun, shone faintly.

"Those eyes were ope'd which would eclipse the day."

Either the Baroness de Wallestein's, or Miss Louisa Mildmay's eyes are here meant, or both if it please you.

"Now sleepless lovers just at twelve awoke."

Lord George Fitzallan perhaps, or Colonel Montague, for the ladies in Portland-place had been up, nay and had even breakfasted, some time ago. "It will soon be the hour when the committee are to meet," said Louisa: "my dear Caroline, your fate will then be decided."

"I wish it were all settled," said Madame de Wallestein, "and that I had spoken to the Baron. It is the first time I ever did any thing without consulting him. I trust he will not be displeased.

"Here he comes," said Louisa; "and such a *quidnunc* I do think I never saw; always the newspaper in his hand for an hour after break-

fast! I suppose it is to perfect himself in the English language."

"*Je tremble*," said the Baroness, "*car, après tout, les hommes sont les maitres.* If he should positively object, what shall I do? And then Lionel, I am sure he will not approve.—*Qu' est-ce que c'est donc, mon ami?*" to M. de Wallestein, "you seem deeply engaged with that folio of four pages, which not e'en critics criticise. *Qu'y a-t-il de nouveau ce matin?* what's the matter?"

"I announce a revolution in the State," said the Baron; "and I come to you, ladies, for an explanation of what this mighty mystery means. Hear what my oracle, *mon prophète*, the always wise and correct Morning Post, prognosticates to us:—

'It is our duty to announce a great change likely to take place in the administration of A-m--k's. It has already been hinted in several of the public papers, that discontents of a serious nature have long existed among the

high executive authorities of that society. There was a rumour afloat yesterday, which we traced to a source not likely to admit of any possibility of error, namely, that a lady of high rank had resigned a post of difficulty and danger, from which she would otherwise have been discharged by her colleagues in office. The Countess of L—b—r, says an evening paper, has positively quitted the ministry. This, however, is not yet formally declared, though her ladyship's intentions are probably already known to the different members of the committee; but the official resignation will not be tendered till to-day at two o'clock, when the Ladies Patronesses hold a meeting extraordinary at Willis's Rooms, and the successor will be immediately appointed. The Countess of H—t—n claims the privilege of nomination.

'Various ladies, we believe, have been thought of for this exalted post; but a foreign constellation is said to be the favourite among the higher powers. We only just venture to

add our hopes that this report may prove true. The distinguished personage in question has our warmest wishes for a successful ballot. We hear much of her beauty and grace.

'We understand that this interesting novice will immediately be initiated into the forms of official life, by the Countess of H—t—n, should her ladyship succeed in carrying this election according to her wishes.'

"Now, ladies, what does all this mean, I pray you?"

"Something about Almack's, *je m'imagine*," said the Baroness, affecting much *nonchalance*.

"Thank you; it does not require a conjuror to find out that, A-m--k's is plain enough; and L—b—r, I suppose, means Lochaber, a Scotch lady we saw one night, I remember, at the Pavilion."

"A great red-faced woman," said the Baroness, "who talks very loud, with a horrid Scotch drawl; and H—t—n, of course, means Hauton; that must be quite evident."

"Very well," said the Baron; "but this foreign constellation, who may she be? The Baroness Wolf? No; I should think her too old for such folly, a *spirituelle dévote*. Oh! *c'est impossible*, and besides, beauty and grace I am sure she has none left. Then *la Princesse* Colloredo, oh! I have heard her often say, '*que le jeu d'Almacks ne valoit pas la chandelle*,' or something of that sort. Well, then, name somebody else, *la Comtesse* de Grotte?"

"Why, she is in bed, you know, with a rheumatic fever."

"Then who can it be, Mademoiselle Louise? Do pray help us," said the baron.

"Indeed, I can't," said Louisa; "I know none of the London fashionables."

"Well, here comes Lionel," said the Baron, "we must ask him. *Mais, mon cher* Colonel, you look very gay this morning; what has amused you?"

Colonel Montague presented his sister with a little note: the seal was "Almack's." "It was

given to me, Caroline, by one of Lady Hauton's footmen, whom I found at the door."

The Baroness opened the billet with a degree of trepidation and anxiety, which could not escape the observation of the wondering Baron. This note, which she read to herself, contained only the following words:

"*Connaught Place, Saturday.*

"My dear Madame de Wallestein.

"I have had written promises from the Duchess of Stavordale, Lady Plinlimmon, and Lady Rochfort, who are all unanimous in your favour, and most anxious you should decide at once to become a member of our administration: the only one who yet stands out is Lady Bellamont, but we shall soon frighten her into compliance; besides, she does not yet know that every body else is agreed. It wants a quarter to twelve now, so let me have your answer as soon as possible; a decided *yes* or *no;* for I must be at the committee before two. Send it back by my

servant, to meet me in King-street, that it may relieve my anxiety. The whole will be settled by three, and you shall have an immediate notification."

"Yours ever,

"GEORGIANA HAUTON."

The Baroness folded up this valuable document very leisurely, and deposited it in that most sacred of all a lady's hiding-places—her reticule. She felt a degree of confusion from consciousness that her husband's eyes were fixed full upon her; when, all at once, Lionel, with an air of mock gravity, said with a smile, "I am come on purpose, thus early, to pay my respects, tho' I believe I ought to say, to do homage, to the new lady patroness: Madame La Baronne, I beg to offer my best congratulations."

"How!" said M. de Wallestein, "what does all this mean? Is Caroline then the foreign constellation of the Morning Post? But pray explain; for I am still in the clouds."

"*Oh mon ami, il n'y a rien de décidé encore,*" said the Baroness, opening the reticule to search for Lady Hauton's note.

"All that I know," said Colonel Montague, "is, that I met Lord Hazlemere just now in St. James's-street, as I came up from the Horse-guards. He stopped me to ask if Lord Mordaunt was arrived, and then congratulated me. On my asking, with some surprise, why? he said that I must have heard, of course, that my sister was expected to be the new Lady Patroness; that he had dined at Lord Hauton's yesterday, where the Queen of Almack's herself had announced it, and that your health was drunk on the occasion. He was then on his road to Willis's Rooms, to meet her ladyship, by appointment, and to hear if the election had taken place. Is this so, my dear Caroline? or am I too early with my compliments? Shall I have to address you in an *épître dédicatoire.* Let me see, I have read somewhere,

" Congratulate 's a word so long,
I scarce can weave it in my song ;
But fear again, I must employ
The ancient phrase of—'wish you joy.' "

" And am I to be the last person informed ?" said the Baron, somewhat displeased: " I should have thought I might have been consulted, but my consent, I suppose, is not required."

" Now, indeed, Wallestein, you do me wrong ; I am often to blame, but not in this case ; ask Louisa. I did not consent ; Lady Hauton came here yesterday most unexpectedly, and made me the offer, nay even insisted on my accepting the situation. I told her that I could not decide till I knew whether you would approve ; but she would not even listen to me. I only wanted a good opportunity to break the thing to you ; Louisa can answer for me, that I was just going to speak to you when Lionel gave me this note," handing the billet to M. deWallestein. " Can you suppose? *me croiriez-vous capable enfin de manquer tellement de confiance en mon*

meilleur ami?—d'oublier tous les égards que je dois à mon mari?" and the Baroness was affected even to tears.

The Baron would not even open Lady Hauton's note, but offering his hand to his tender Caroline, he said, "*Je te crois, ma chère petite, sans lire le billet justificatif. Pardonnez à ce petit mouvement de vivacité.* But you see, my love, how necessary prudence and caution are in this world. This will show you how reports spread in a moment, and how little credit should be attached to the *on-dits* of society. Lord Hazlemere's friends have been quizzing him; but the consequences are, that it is reported all over the town that you are the new Lady Patroness, though you had thought so little of it as not even to have found time to tell me of the offer having been made you: it is really unfortunate."

The Baroness's countenance fell.

"I know you too well, my dear," continued M. de Wallestein, "to suppose for a moment that such an office would suit your disposition;

votre gout pour la campagne, votre penchant décidé pour la retraite enfin. The flattery of court butterflies would have no charm for you; you would despise the important triflers who would kneel to you for admissions. I cannot imagine my elegant and *spirituelle* Caroline degrading herself into a hawker of tickets, an agent for balls; leaving her husband and children, abandoning the pleasures of home, to spend hours in ceaseless contention in a close committee-room."

"*Oh! pour le coup c'est trop,*" said Madame de Wallestein, with considerable warmth; "*je n'y puis plus tenir:* you have caught that vile habit of quizzing since you came to England."

"I thought I had been expressing your own sentiments, my dear love," said the Baron; "I had no intention to quiz you, *mais serieusement, que voulez-vous dire?* what do you mean?'

"To accept such an offer as this, by all means, I should say," interposed Louisa.

"The retired and domestic Madame de Wal-

lestein," said Lionel ironically, "is inclined to sacrifice her tastes, her time, and her habits of ease and retirement from anxiety, for the public good; she consents to become the victim of ambition and the slave of the world of fashion."

"*Quel dévouement héroïque!*" observed M. de Wallestein with a smile.

"What nonsense all this is!" said the Baroness, with some degree of impatience, "*tout ce verbiage ne dit rien du tout. Moi Anglaise, je me trouve comme étrangère à Londres; j'y connais très peu de monde; on m'offre un poste honorable, une distinction certaine qui me procurera une position très flatteuse dans le monde;* if I accept this extraordinary offer, I am assured that I shall become *haut ton, tout de suite*; every body knows that in England *ton* governs every thing, and yet *mon mari balance à se décider si je dois l'accepter ou non. Eh, bon Dieu! que voudriez-vous donc que je fasse?*"

"Accept it, by all means, my dear Caroline," said the Baron; "be a patroness, if you think it

will make you happy. Forget the waste of time and anxiety, which this office will occasion you: the impertinence you will have to swallow, the rudeness you will have to commit, the friends whom you must refuse, the obligations you must forget: and if you imagine that the distinction of this post of honour will make amends for such distressing duties!!! again I repeat it, accept the appointment."

"Oh, but *je n'ai rien à faire de ta philosophie à present*," said the Baroness, "*mais je profiterai de ta permission à l'instant.* I must write Lady Hauton word, without loss of time."

The gentlemen left the room, and the lady sat down to her writing-desk, and penned the following note:—

"My dear Lady Hauton,

"I have with some difficulty obtained the Baron de Wallestein's permission to accept your flattering offer, and I trust that your kind instructions will enable me to perform my official

duties, so as not to reflect discredit on your ladyship's choice of your much obliged,

"CAROLINE DE WALLESTEIN."

"There," said she, showing the note to Louisa, "I think that will do: I will send it off directly, so that Lady Hauton may receive it as she enters the committee room. I knew Wallestein would come round at last. Was he really quizzing, do you think? No! *il entend si peu les femmes*—he has so little ambition of that sort of distinction, that I really believe he fancied it was a sort of trouble I should not like."

In about an hour after this, a large packet was brought to the Baroness; on opening it, she found the following notification in the form of a letter:—

"James and William Willis have received the instructions of the ladies patronesses of the balls at Almack's, to inform the Baroness de

Wallestein, that, at the committee held this day, an unanimous resolution has passed, to confer on her Excellency the office of Patroness, vacant by the resignation of the Dowager Countess of Lochaber."

King-street, St. James's.
Saturday, April 6th, 182. .

" J. and W. Willis have the honour to inform the Baroness de Wallestein that the regular committee for the discharge of business will meet as usual, on Monday the 8th of April, when her attendance is *most* earnestly and particularly *desired*. The Countess of Hauton in the chair."

The next enclosure was a printed paper, containing the following notification :—

" James and William Willis beg to inform the nobility in general, that Almack's will recommence, on Wednesday, April 10th, under the following patronage :—

" The Duchess of Stavordale.
The Countess of Bellamont.
The Marchioness of Plinlimmon.
The Countess of Hauton.
The Viscountess Rochefort."

(Below was written.)

In room of the Countess of Lochaber, who has resigned,

The Baroness de Wallestein.

King-street St. James's, April 6th, 182. .

There was, besides, a little private note :—

" My dear Baroness,

" I send you the notification of your being duly appointed. The whole thing has gone off even better than I could have expected. Lady Bellamont made a mere show of opposition : she had tact enough to see she would be over-ruled, and so yielded voluntarily. The whole committee are all anxiety to see you ; and therefore, if fortunately this should find you at home, get

into my carriage directly, and come to us here, that I may introduce you without loss of time. Send me word if you cannot do this; it is not of very great consequence, as it can be done on Monday: only they are all here, and dying to see you.

"Yours ever,

"G. HAUTON."

"Willis's Rooms, 3 o'clock."

The Baroness lost no time in obeying the summons: Mademoiselle Flore was unusually hurried in her operations, but yet the cachemere was arranged with perfect taste, so as to show the peculiar beauty of the border; that unique design which had been the envy and admiration of all the Paris *belles*, since Monsieur Ternaux had declared it to be the only one of that pattern ever made. To think that shawls should now be proscribed to any woman under forty, which, of course, in France, is equivalent to a total prohibition.

One of Monsieur Herbaut's most beautiful hats was *posé* on the pretty little head, *juste comme il faut, un petit peu de ce coté là, pas trop, c'est cela;* and Madame la Baronne was pronounced *ravissante.* She cast a glance at herself in the glass, and could not but secretly agree in Mademoiselle Flore's opinion of her charms: she told Louisa to wait till her return, before she took her walk, and then tripped most gaily down the stairs, and entered the splendid equipage of Lady Hauton, which drove with a pace of authority to Almack's; her little heart beating violently all the way, from the agitation of vanity.

She had reason, however, to be perfectly satisfied with her reception from all the fair authorities:—the whole conclave seemed struck with admiration. Her grace and her beauty, her dress and her manners, were equally approved.

After the compliments of congratulation had been properly gone through, Lady Hauton pro-

posed to set home her friend. Willis and all his satellites were in waiting to catch a glimpse of the new divinity, as she proceeded to the carriage; and various dandies were parading the street, some on horseback, some on foot, to make their bows to Lady Hauton, and put up their glasses, so as to declare they had had the first peep of the new Patroness.

As they drove home, Lady Hauton gave a slight sketch of her colleagues to her distinguished *protégée*, concluding thus;—"Lady Plinlimmon was your warmest friend from the first; she adores every thing foreign and elegant. The Duchess of Stavordale always likes whatever Lady Plinlimmon chooses; for she follows her like a shadow—a very portly one, you will say,—truly so: from the first she was quite in your interest; and I assure you she staid to be introduced to you, though her baby had been waiting for her above an hour: poor little creature! it must have been nearly starved. Lady Bellamont, the dear friend of the much-

injured Lady Lochaber, of course opposed any friend of mine. Your crime was coming after that venerable Scotch lady, who has all the blood of all the clans in her veins, to say nothing of her face, neck and hands, and is, besides, first cousin to the stately Bellamont. That erudite lady, moreover, objected to you because she thought an Austrian ambassadress must be of what Madame de Staël calls *la race Teutonique étrangère*, with at least sixteen quarters; but when she found that you were really an Englishwoman bred and born, and the daughter of a Baronet, who had lived at a fine old abbey, and had had a large landed property, she condescendingly allowed that it altered the case completely, and so she withdrew her opposition.

"Lady Rochefort, who thinks herself the beauty of the committee, was afraid at first that your charms might eclipse hers; but she happily discovered that you were a complete brunette, with a slight figure, and as she is a *blonde*,

and given to *embonpoint*, she is no longer in dread lest my cousin Lord Mordaunt should be at your feet, when she would retain him at her's; so she generously agreed not to oppose you, on one condition, that she should not be obliged to sit next you on the patronesses seat; because she thinks, that with your style of complexion, you will often wear yellow, scarlet, and *couleurs prononcées*, which would make her look pale and *fade*. Pity the dear delicate creature had not married that pale-faced Dorville! they would then have been a couple of "fairly fairs," who might have "died of a rose in aromatic pain" together. Well, here we are arrived at your mansion, my dear Madame de Wallestein; you must excuse my getting out, for I have a thousand things to do and settle in the next two hours. Monday, you know, we must be at the committee at two o'clock; I will call for you. Lady Lochaber's books will be made over to you, but I dare say you will have a host of applications to-morrow. Adieu, adieu. Did Wil-

lis put in the baskets? Here," to the servant, "take out the three Almack's baskets."

"What, so soon back!" exclaimed Louisa, rising from the great arm-chair, and putting down the last new novel, as the Baroness entered the room; "now tell us all about it."

"Oh! the story is soon told; Lady Hauton met me at the door of the apartment, and introduced me to all the ladies who were then and there assembled in full divan, *et d'abord je fus présentée à chacune séparément, et puis les complimens d'usage, alors on s'examina de part et d'autre, on me critiqua en secret, vous n'en doutez pas.*"

"And who were there? describe the ladies."

"Oh! Lady Hauton is quite the reigning power, to whom they all pay implicit deference; *et elle se sert de toutes ses armes—la flatterie pour l'une, les reproches pour l'autre, elle se moque de celle-ci, elle caresse celle-là, et elle parle pour tout le monde.*"

"The Duchess of Stavordale is a round,

fat, jolly-looking woman, with a vulgar good-humoured countenance; very civil in her manner; and she shook my hand so violently, *à la manière Anglaise*, that she forced my rings quite into my fingers."

Next came the Marchioness of Plinlimmon, who is quite in another style; official and important, a tall, stately-looking personage, full of the dignity of office, *une femme à grands mots enfin*."

"Lady Bellamont is a thin, pale, gawky looking woman, with a very cross countenance, *qui me fit la mine de coté, comme si elle ne me voulait pas du bien;* and I overheard her saying something to Lady Rochefort about her poor dear friend Lady Lochaber.

"*Cette petite Vicomtesse* is very pretty, and very affected, and they say, is *très méchante* and *spirituelle: je parie qu'elle a déja fait quelque plaisanterie sur mon compte:* she is short, and fat and fair, *et très coquette.* I have heard that her husband neglects her terribly, but she con-

soles herself by having always some favoured attendants, and her constant swain last year was Lord Mordaunt."

"And what did you do afterwards?"

"Oh, nothing at all! they looked at me, and I looked at them. I see plainly that I am Lady Hauton's patroness, and that this bold step has completely established her ladyship's power. I would rather be her friend than her enemy, for I think her a very fearful kind of person, she dares do or say any thing to any body. Then she has such powers of ridicule, that she frightens all into compliance with her will and pleasure: she told the Duchess of Stavordale that Lord Hazlemere had made a capital caricature of Lady Lochaber paying her *adieux* to the committee, which she intends to have lithographed as a vignette to the air of "Adieu to Lochaber," which she is arranging as a quadrille to be played on Wednesday."

"And what are these baskets for, which Felix has just brought in?" enquired Louisa.

"Oh! the large one is to hold all the notes of application, as they come in promiscuously. Then, of the other two, you see one has, 'Almack's admitted,' marked on it: that one I shall leave on Monday with Willis, after I have signed all the vouchers, that he may send them over the town, after he has made out the tickets, which the people will send for on Wednesday. This other basket, marked 'Almack's rejected,' of course contains all the applications which are not successful, from which a list is made, to save trouble, of those who are never, on any account, to be admitted. Then I am to have a complete visiting book made out of all my visiting acquaintance, as no one can be admitted whom you do not previously visit; and there is a splendid folio to be bound, with my name in gilt letters on the back, in which *le bon homme*, Willis, is to enter the names of all whom I admit on my books, as they term it. *Oh! je l'assure, ma chère Louise, qu'il n'y a point d'affaire*

d'état arrangée avec plus de soin et d'ordre, que ne sont ces choses-ci."

"Oh! I am quite aware of that," replied Louisa; "but whom have we here?" and the door opened for Lady Anne Norbury.

"You see what it is, my dear Madame de Wallestein, to make your house so very agreeable; you have exposed yourself to be often tormented with my visits, for you and Louisa are such charming society. However, this time I am sent by a higher power; for my mother, unusual as it is for her to be deeply interested about any thing, is, in this case, most anxious about the fate of Almack's, and the patronesses. 'To be, or not to be,' what is determined?"

"We have just had *une longue discussion sur ce chapitre*," replied the Baroness, "but we gained the day; nay more, I have just been with that charming Lady Hauton, to Willis's Rooms, to be introduced to all my fair colleagues. I can

assure you that I had a hard battle to fight with our two gentlemen."

"And so you are really, then, the new lady patroness; pray accept my best congratulations on so important an appointment. But what do you mean by saying that you had two gentlemen to win over: why, surely, that interesting-looking love of a secretary could not have any thing to say against Almack's. He is so much too young to play the part of Cato the Censor."

"Oh! we were not speaking of M. de Rosenval. It was my brother Lionel, who was so against my being a patroness."

"Oh! Colonel Montague was the man, was he? Well! I can fancy he would disapprove of Almack's, and all her patronesses too. I suppose he is here constantly?" and Lady Anne gave a sly glance at Louisa.

"Oh! we cannot exist without him," said Madame de Wallestein; "I may say he almost lives with us."

"That must be a most agreeable arrangement for all parties," said her ladyship significantly.

Louisa could not help feeling annoyed at the insinuation, which, however, the Baroness did not in the least comprehend; in a minute, Lady Anne added in her rattling way: "Louisa, my dear, I have several interesting pieces of news for you. Do you know, Mordaunt is arrived; came last night, and has taken possession of his own apartment: and now prepare your best blushes, my love. Did you ever observe, Madame de Wallestein, how prettily your friend Louisa colours upon all proper occasions? the brightest red, there! see how it comes now! Well! to reward you, know then that cousin George is also arrived, as full of fun as usual; and so, in consequence, my father and mother have recovered their spirits. Mordaunt looks very black and solemn, buttoned up tighter than ever; he has certainly had an increase of bile lately. Methinks, too, George regrets you,

or your guitar, most tenderly. I dare say, if Madame de Wallestein has a spare room in this house, he will be too happy to occupy it. Why I protest the colour is mounting now to her very temples, fever heat."

"Nonsense!" said Louisa; "Caroline, you have no idea what a wicked person Lady Anne is, always making a joke of every body."

"Now what have I said, pray, to occasion such a beautiful bloom? But I see, 'conscience will make beauties of us all:'—now is not that a great improvement on the word? Well, I have done, my dear Louisa! I leave you safe, with two strings to your bow, or two beaux in a string, whichever you like. But, Madame de Wallestein, you must let her have her own way in flirting, and then you will see her, as I have done, for days together, tormenting two unfortunate men; though she means nothing more all the time, than 'Gentlemen, I am your very humble servant.' No! no! that will not

do either, for Louisa must be always as free as air."

"Is Lord George handsomer than M. de Rosenval?" enquired the Baroness: "I ought certainly to remember him perfectly, for I knew him, both at Spa and at Paris; but his features are quite gone out of my head."

"Oh, they are so different! The little Count de Rosenval is so fair, such a true Saxon-looking youth, so full of sentiment and grace. Now, George is all fire and dash; such a manly, soldier-like creature, with a smile that puts every one into spirits:—but he has no sentiment; he laughs at romance."

"Oh, *le monstre!*" said the Baroness; "then he can know nothing of love."

"Wait and see, my dear madam; or ask Louisa; but surely you cannot have forgotten his handsome countenance."

"Let me see," said the Baroness, putting herself in an attitude of recollection, "*attendez*

donc. There were such crowds of military just then at Paris. Whose staff was he on? So many generals, I feel puzzled."

"He was on the duke's staff," said Louisa; "you knew him so well, and he was one of your great favourites. Don't you remember his fighting a duel with a Frenchman, in the Champs Elysées, who was impertinent to a fair duchess at a ball? she was dancing with Lord George. He was wounded in the arm, and was obliged to have his sleeve tied with bows; and *des manches à la Fitz* were all the fashion immediately, fastened with bows."

"*Ah! bien, je me le rappele maintenant, un joli Irlandais*, a fine figure, but not so tall as Lionel; curling black hair, beautiful eyes, very white teeth, set off by a pair of most Spanish-looking mustachios, a short upper lip, *l'air très prévenant*. Oh! I have him now in my mind's eye. He was reckoned the best *valeur parmi les militaires Anglais*. Still he is not so handsome as Lionel. What do you say, Lady Anne?"

"Oh, certainly, Colonel Montague is the finer man; so very tall, six feet two at least, and such remarkably fine features. But then he looks older and graver than Lord George; besides, he never dances, which is a terrible blot in his escutcheon."

"The eldest son, Lord Killarney, is very ill, is not he?" enquired the Baroness de Wallestein.

"So the Morning Post declares," replied Lady Anne, "but I hardly believe it; though I overheard a lady recommending Lord George to Lady Birmingham the other night, because he was a certain *bon parti*, a future marquis. But my uncle Allandale writes word to mamma, that Killarney himself says nothing about being ill, so I know not what to believe. There is always a mystery attends that queer cousin of mine in whatever he does. Perhaps Madame de Wallestein has never heard how much I am interested about this same Lord Killarney. He has been held out in *terrorem* to me all my

life, as my future lord and master; so, with the natural perversity of my sex, I am resolved to dislike him only out of spite, though I hear of nothing but his agreeables from every body. Now, I own I should dearly like to make him fall desperately in love with me, and then I would send him off thus," and her ladyship snapped her fingers with much animation. "I should then revenge the cause of my sex upon this gallant, gay Lothario, this universal deceiver. Now, Louisa, see what an example of openness I set you, in thus unfolding all my affairs to you. So I shall say now, *Tocca a lei Signora.*"

"But I have nothing to tell," replied Louisa, half smiling half sighing; "I wish I had."

"Sighing for a declaration, I protest. What do you think of that, Madame de Wallestein?"

"I am *toute étonnée!* Do you know, Lady Anne, that when I heard Louisa was to stay so long at Norbury, I settled that Lord Mordaunt must be in love with her."

"Oh! my dear Madam, you were quite wrong. My good brother has already two wives—politics and the turf; if he takes a third, she must be all gold. Mordaunt will marry some hump-backed heiress at last; when he is ruined, and not before."

"I wonder he has not made up to the heiress at the Abbey, then; for she will be richer than any body, and she is not hump-backed,—which would be an advantage."

"Oh! but he is not quite ruined yet; and he would, perhaps, think of her, if my father was not always urging him to it. I wish you could have heard the conversation between him and George this morning after breakfast; it was so good. 'Mordaunt, are you going to Tattersal's this morning?' said cousin George. 'No, I am going quite the other way.' 'Perhaps to call on Hazlemere, in North Audley-street? 'No, to the other part of the town.' 'What, towards Regent-street?' 'Yes, I shall be there in the course of the morning, certainly.'

'So, my old fellow, I see you are going to obey your governor. Come now, confess, you are going to the Birmingham warehouse, to take a look at the premises without loss of time—hem?' 'I suppose I may leave my card on Lady Birmingham, without my father having any thing to do with it?' This was said with some warmth. 'Oh! to be sure,' replied George with one of his saucy looks; 'you are quite in the right, and I mean to follow your example. I shall go in too, if my lady is at home:—I give you warning. '*Comme il vous plaira*,' said my brother with great *nonchalance*. 'Well, then, we can go in together; we may as well start fair, you know,' and George looked vastly malicious.—But now, what could this mean? Have you advised your friend Lord George to enter the list of Miss Birmingham's admirers?"

"I have already told your ladyship," said Louisa rather sharply, "that I have nothing to do with Lord George, or he with me. It is

very disagreeable to be so tormented about him."

"Well then, pretty dear! it shan't be teazed about him any more; and it shall flirt unnoticed in the corner of every room."

"Ah! *L'Amour est un enfant trompeur*," said the Baroness, turning to the piano, and playing that pretty air from the old opera of "*Blaize et Babet*."

"That is the *morale*," said Lady Anne, laughing; "and pretty enough it is. But here is your carriage driving up to the door, Madame de Wallestein, so I must be off;—for I see it is past four. What do you do this evening?"

"We dine at Lady Birmingham's."

"Do you, indeed! Well, I envy you. Pray give me an account of all the *prétendans* you meet there."

At last the volatile Lady Anne took her leave, and Louisa followed the Baroness to the carriage. How was the morning spent? Of

course, in the usual style of a fine lady's morning. The London season had yet scarcely commenced, but the preliminaries were already *en train*.

> "A thousand cards a day at doors to leave,
> And, in return, a thousand cards receive,"

is one great employment of all women of fashion. And then, there is always that delightful resource—shopping, to occupy every idle hour. So many lounges, *pour passer le temps*, and empty the pockets. That ruination shop in Waterloo-place; the various bazaars; and afterwards some new novel to enquire for at Andrews's, though that tiresome man has never got the thing at home you most want. Boosey's classical foreign music-shop probably comes next. Then, after showing yourself sufficiently often in Bond-street, St. James's-street, and Pall-Mall, drive off, post-haste, to the dear enchanting Park, as the last and best resort; where, if the crowd will permit, you may see your

friends, at least, though without any chance of speaking to them; and be choked with dust, if you escape being broiled by the unintercepted rays of the sun.

Oh! it is a rational life, at the very best, this same interesting mode of passing time in London; and we of the nineteenth century are a most philosophical sort of people, in very truth. What with the busy lives of the very idle, and the idle lives of the very busy, it would seem almost difficult to determine which is best—"*ne rien faire*"—*ou* "*ne faire que des riens.*" But I am digressing most unmercifully; *revenons donc à nos moutons!*

Louisa felt depressed; she saw nobody she knew in the park, though it was quite full, particularly of men; and she felt it cold and disagreeable, though every one of the Baroness's *attentifs*, as they put their heads in at the window of the carriage, exclaimed, in various fashionable drawling tones, "How hot it is!"—

"Delicious day."—"Charming sun."—"Quite summer, I declare."—"Upon my honour it is, positively like July."

They took one turn, no more, in pity to her yawning companion; the Baroness pulled the check-string, and ordered home, though it was not six o'clock.

When they reached Portland-place, the attentive Felix came himself to the door of the carriage, and informed Madame la Baronne, in a very mysterious manner, that *un monsieur très comme il faut* was in the drawing-room waiting to see her: "*Un jeune militaire, Madame, avec des moustaches énormes,*" said the old Frenchman, stroking his upper lip, "*il a beaucoup démandé des nouvelles de Madame et de celles de Mademoiselle; il a voulu absolument voir les enfans, et le voila qui joue avec M. Gustave, tous les deux aussi heureux que des rois.*"

"Who can it be?" said the Baroness.

"I cannot imagine," replied Louisa.

Felix threw open the drawing-room door; and there, with Gustavus on his knee, appeared, in the highest spirits, Lord George Fitzallan himself.—What a surprise!!

"My dear Louisa," said he, with one of his gayest smiles, "here I am, you see, with my usual coolness, forcing myself uninvited into Madame la Baronne de Wallestein's house: will you apologize for me, by saying that I really thought Montague lived here till this little man," pointing to the child, "explained to me where his uncle lodged? May I flatter myself, Madame de Wallestein, that you will forgive this intrusion, in consideration of our old Paris intimacy?"

The Baroness was never more inclined to be gracious. He was so handsome, and so good-humoured! She expressed herself delighted to see him, and laid herself out to be particularly agreeable.

"But, Miss Louisa, you look pale; I hope

you have not been unwell since we parted," said Lord George, with much tenderness of manner, as he held his hand out to her in his usual frank open-hearted way.

Louisa could not but take it, yet the unbidden tear started to her eye. He saw her distress, and, being conscious that he was the cause of it, he redoubled his attentions. There was a something in Lord George's natural manner that no woman ever could resist; he had a kind of manly gallantry about him, which was quite contagious.

She listened to his rattling nonsense with her usual delight; and, before it was time to dress for dinner, her spirits had recovered all their animation.

Lord George had been sent by Lady Norbury, to invite Madame de Wallestein and Louisa to sit in her Ladyship's pew at St. George's church the next day. She and Lady Anne never went in the morning; eleven o'clock was too early an hour for them.

"And so you dine at the Birminghams to-day," exclaimed Lord George; "for I have been examining the card-racks. By Jove! how lucky I called there this morning with Mordaunt, and we were both asked to meet you. Mind you keep a place for me on your side," said he, turning to Louisa; "for I think most likely I shall be very late: that arrangement will make me happy, you know. And poor Lionel, pray take care he gets next Miss Birmingham, and then all will be right."

"*Oh! ma chère Louise, qu'il est charmant!*" said the Baroness, certainly before he could have got down stairs; "*et mon enfant, il t'aime, il t'aime—enfin comme on doit aimer.* How lucky that he is to meet us to-day! You will have him next you, and I feel quite certain that he will propose in form, either at dinner, or perhaps in the evening, if you manage to get him next you on a sofa, or on one of those Turkish cushions in the corner near the fire-

place, my love, where you will be quite warm and snug to yourselves; and then, after dinner a man's heart naturally opens, *sur tout au coin du feu:* I have often observed, that a comfortable seat will hasten a declaration; men are such lovers of ease, so naturally sensual. I shall persuade the Baron not to order the carriage till eleven o'clock, to give time. Pray put on your new white gown, my love, and those turquoise ornaments, with that pretty blue garland, it becomes your light hair so particularly; and a *soupçon* of *rouge*, just to give a glow—nothing more! what even Julia herself could not disapprove."

But Louisa wanted no *rouge*, the fever of her mind supplied Nature's brightest bloom, and nervous agitation gave uncommon spirit to her countenance. She looked all brilliancy; she felt all happiness.

No one but a Frenchwoman would ever have thought of the dress, when they could gaze

upon the lovely wearer; and not even a Frenchman could have seen her without saying,

"L'Art n'est pas fait pour toi; tu n'en as pas besoin."

CHAPTER II.

EMBARRASSMENTS.

"Alas! how light a cause may move
Dissension between hearts that love—
A something light as air!—a look!
A word unkind, or wrongly taken—
Oh! love that tempests never shook,
A breath, a touch like this, has shaken."

MOORE.

And now to dinner, with what appetite we may, at Lady Birmingham's. It was a splendid entertainment in every respect: in point of expense, it was well worthy the high reputation for extravagance, which the celebrated French artist, who had superintended the manufacturing of it, had long obtained. The various arrangements were all in keeping, and were well

calculated to display the immense wealth of the donors. Innumerable servants, a mansion, more like a prince's palace, and illuminated as if it were for the reception of majesty itself, served only to prove, that certainly in many things too much is worse than too little, as being more ridiculous.

The company, for a wonder, were slightly acquainted; for Lady Birmingham's dinners were in general composed of the odds and ends of fashionable society: which made the witty Colonel Leach once observe, that he supposed all their dining people's tickets were put into a bag, and that, when they wanted to give a feed, the butler drew out a certain number of names, and sent the invitation cards round. Lady Birmingham had also for several years maintained as her opinion, that provided you had a man cook, his being good or bad was of no consequence; the appetites of the world being, like their other senses, under the dominion of humbug; in the same manner in which every speech

that comes from the mouth of a very great man, is sure to be accounted witty. However, *peu-à-peu*, her ladyship had discovered, that there were yet a few people left, who could discriminate between pretence and reality; and therefore, now that Barbara was come out, and was to be presented at Court, she determined that all about her should be positively striking. So, having heard that the Duke of Stavordale was parting with the celebrated M. Rissole, on account of his unheard of extravagance, Lady Birmingham immediately engaged this first of *cordons bleus*, which enabled her to boast that she gave her *chef de cuisine* higher wages than was paid to any cook in London, and that, moreover, he had consumed thirty-six partridges to make one *consommé!!* The reputation of M. Rissole, however, did wonders; for people were beginning to tire a little of the wealth and dulness of the Birmingham's, but a first-rate French cook no one can tire of. Besides, all the world of fashion wanted to see the interior of the ware-

house, that they might be enabled to take a peep at the cabinet curiosity, as they designated Barbara; and most that saw her once, wished to see her again. She was so little like what they expected to have found her; so quiet and unpretending; so elegant, as well as beautiful. Lord Beaulieu, and two of his fair daughters, were among the dinner guests this day: his lordship was as grave and silent as usual, while the young ladies chattered unceasingly to every body; taking especial care always to be as far removed as possible from their dear papa. Next appeared the Archdeacon and Lady Margaret Carlton, with their two rectangular daughters, all over maraboos and pink roses, armed at every point with bows and bouquets, wanting, in short, nothing but admirers: their brother Adolphus Frederick sported a higher collar, and stiffer cravat, than ever man had worn before. Lady Margaret was in great distress about the Duke of Clanalpin; on his road from Mac-Ivor Tower, he had been snowed up

twice, at different inns on the great road; the last time, he had been detained a week at the agreeable town of Brough, in Yorkshire, where he had caught such a cold, that he had been obliged to remain with his friend Dr. Ferguson at Doncaster some days, in order to recruit. His Grace was not yet arrived, and her ladyship was quite distressed lest he should not come in time for Almack's, the only public place the Duke ever attended. Next Lady Margaret Carlton sat, on one side, Lord Beaulieu, who divided her from Lady Birmingham, and, on the other, Lord Hare, a very affected young man, son to Lord Bellamont: his lordship was not in the humour to talk, because he had been disappointed in not having the Baroness near him, for he was a professed admirer of every thing foreign. But Madame de Wallestein had placed herself by little Sir Benjamin, who was delighted to have an opportunity of expatiating upon the various improvements he had made in the pig-sties and poultry yards at Atherford: she was much

amused, both with the topics he selected for her edification, and also with his singular manner and style of expression, and therefore paid little attention to the soft nothings which Mr. Carlton addressed to her, from time to time, on the other side, *sotto voce ;* besides, she was considerably interested in watching the proceedings of her brother and Barbara, who sat opposite. Sir Benjamin had his own way in few things, but one little whim he was indulged in, namely, that his daughter should always sit next him at dinner, because she could then explain every thing about every body, their names and qualities, and so forth ; and, by a little manœuvring of the judicious Julia, to-day Lionel was placed next the young lady.

" Colonel Montague by Barbara, and Madame de Wallestein by me," said the Baronet with infinite delight. " Well ! for a wonder, I declare we are all quite right, because we can talk about the Abbey : a nice little snug family party, as we may call ourselves."

This arrangement, however, was far from pleasing my Lady Birmingham; but it was impossible to alter it without seeming particular, so she looked all smiles as she said to Lord Beaulieu,

"If Lady Olivia is not afraid of the fire, perhaps she will take the seat next Mr. Carlton? Miss Charlotte Augusta, will you have the goodness to move to the other side, by Lord Mordaunt? I cannot have brother and sister together."

The young lady obeyed with pleasure: to be next an unmarried Lord must always be a good thing; and Lady Olivia liked the look of Mr. Carlton, he was such a complete love of a dandy, she thought.

The Baron de Wallestein was in the post of honour, on the right hand of the lady of the mansion: he was bored to death, for her ladyship never ceased talking; but it was all about herself and her wealth, so that he could have no conversation with Julia, who was his other

neighbour; but she, with her usual good-nature, was trying all she could to amuse the eldest Miss Carlton, whose gloomy looks showed that she was much disconcerted at not having even the shadow of a man near her. Miss Mildmay herself felt perfectly happy in seeing how well employed Lionel and Barbara seemed to be. She was only afraid lest the Archdeacon should observe how deeply engaged they were with each other; but she forgot that at dinner this venerable gentleman was always too much ingrossed with eating to mind any thing else. Certainly, there can be no place better than a great London dinner for carrying on a flirtation; where all the world are so busy talking and eating, that very few can observe what their friends are doing, and where there is always such a noise of plates and knives and forks, that any thing may be said: and if there is a large party, as there must be plenty of time, so much may certainly be done to advance matters.

At this very pleasant party there was, how-

ever, one person far, very far, from happy, and that was poor Louisa, who had entered the house with the anticipation of as much happiness as a London dinner could well afford. She sat on the other side of the long-necked Apollonia Carlton, who, however, took no sort of notice of her, being entirely ingrossed in watching Lord Mordaunt's operations with her more fortunate sister —not, indeed, that she had much cause for jealousy, as the conversation proceeded little farther than such questions as the following:—

"When may I ask you to take wine?—sherry, of course?—May I have the honour to send you some ham?—Were you in the Park to-day? —Insufferably full!—Are you going to the Opera to-night?—Infamously bad!—Shall you be at Almack's, on Wednesday?—All the world will be there!"

"Take that empty chair away, by Miss Louisa Mildmay," said Sir Benjamin; "who is there wanting?"

"No, no! leave it a little longer," said Lady

Birmingham; "I still hope Lord George Fitz-allan may come: he seemed to think he might be very late. Lord Mordaunt, can you give any account of your cousin?"

"I left him here this morning," said his lordship; "that's all I know of his motions: I have not seen him since. Can *you* tell us any thing about him, Miss Louisa? I should think you were as likely to know as any body."

And he darted on her one of his most satirical glances, across Lady Agnes Beaulieu.

"He stayed with us till we went to dress," said the Baroness de Wallestein, in a tone meant to be distinctly heard by every body, "and he then said he should meet us here."

"Then he divided the day between us," said Lady Birmingham, laughing; "for he was in this house till long after luncheon; and so very agreeable, so vastly Irish and droll! so many anecdotes about the ladies patronesses! Oh! but, Madame de Wallestein, I beg your pardon; I really had forgot."

"*Il ne faut pas parler de corde, dans la maison d'un pendu,*" said the Baroness to Adolphus Frederick.

He answered with a shrug; French not being very familiar to this fashionable young gentleman.

Lord Mordaunt was certainly not at his ease; he would have given worlds to have been able to see Miss Birmingham's countenance when Lord George was mentioned; but unfortunately he was on the same side of the table with her, and, whenever he tried to look down as far as where she sat, he always caught Lionel's smiling face: he fairly wished him at the devil, and Lady Agnes, and the fair Charlotte Augusta, anywhere but at his sides. To be pinioned by two odious chattering girls, and with higher game in view—'twas too provoking!

The dinner went on *con spirito;* the hungry visitors

> "Tried all *hors d'œuvres,* all *liqueurs* defined:
> Judicious drank, and greatly daring dined."

For it was, indeed, no small risk to cut through all those extraordinary compositions, whose disguised ingredients are generally unknown to the guests, and highly inflammatory and unwholesome, though they did infinite credit to the talents of Monsieur Rissole.

Dinner was over, and no Lord George arrived ;—poor Louisa !

" How very extraordinary !" said Lady Birmingham. " He accepted the invitation this morning with so much pleasure, only saying he might by possibility be late."

During dessert a note was given to her ladyship.

" Lord George Fitzallan's compliments ; is very much vexed that most particular and unexpected business will prevent his being able to come to dinner."

" Very odd, indeed !" said her ladyship of Birmingham.

" Deuced provoking !" said the Baronet ; " that same lord is such a merry chap."

"What the devil can it be?" muttered Lord Mordaunt.

The Baroness and Julia, each at the same moment, cast an anxious glance at Louisa; who gave one long-drawn sigh, and then took some brandy cherries by way of consolation.

Il y a reméde à tout dans ce bas monde.

"So you have been with the Sydenhams, Lord Mordaunt?" said Lord Hare. "Is the fair Laura in beauty?"

Lord Mordaunt started, as if he had been shot, and answered, in a very absent manner, that he believed she was, but he was no judge of beauty.

This called forth a smile, even from Louisa.

"Hazlemere raves about her," continued Lord Hare; "he thinks her handsomer even than her mother—was."

"Perhaps," returned the other; "but not than she is."

"Well done," said Lady Margaret; "there 's a champion for you! As my brother the Duke

says, 'the age of gallantry is certainly coming back again.' Clanalpin is always the defender of the fair sex."

"And a powerful defender too; witness his calves," said the Archdeacon: "I do not know a stronger man."

"Dr. Carlton does not understand metaphor," whispered Lord Mordaunt to Lady Agnes Beaulieu.

She smiled and looked very pretty, though she herself did not comprehend what his Lordship meant.

But we have prolonged the rich repast already too much, and therefore we may as well adjourn into the great drawing-room, though both the gallery and anteroom were also splendidly lighted-up. The new furniture shone out to the greatest advantage, rich scarlet damask set off with the most splendid gilding; each chair cost thirty guineas, as Lady Birmingham took an early opportunity of informing her friends, and it served as a very agreeable sub-

ject of conversation. The taste of Mr. Soho, and his expensiveness, and his unpunctuality were discussed in all their bearings. Next, Almack's came upon the tapis. Lady Birmingham's hopes and fears were enlarged upon; her delight when she heard of Madame de Wallestein's appointment, the certainty of receiving a favourable answer from her. She should have applied to her immediately, had not both Lord Mordaunt and Lord George Fitzallan come on purpose that morning to offer her tickets: the latter was so very agreeable, such an universal favourite, that she had been much flattered by his *empressement;* and Barbara had been quite charmed with him."

"He is a new acquaintance of your Ladyship's, is not he?" said Louisa, affecting composure.

"He came on purpose with Lord Mordaunt this morning, in order to be presented to us," said Lady Birmingham, swelling with consequence. "I am sorry to hear that Lord Killarney is quite

given over ;" and her ladyship's eyes brightened with pleasure at the very idea.

"I know nothing about him," said the Baroness, with much *sang froid.*

"Lord George's elder brother, I mean ; you must surely have heard him mentioned ; and only think, what a difference his death would make to that young man : such a change in his prospects. The Duke of N—— tells me that the Allandale estates are immense."

"But Irish property is so uncertain," said Lady Margaret Carlton, with a hem ! "Commend me to my own dear highlands. The number of acres now that Clanalpin has between Mac-Ivor Tower and the sea is ——."

Coffee interrupted her Ladyship, or she might have described the advantages of this sterile property.

"Barbara," said Lady Birmingham, "you have not followed Lord George Fitzallan's advice. Miss Louisa, he told her that you had

some little Spanish airs which would just suit my daughter's voice; he was sure you would let her copy them. We had a great deal of music this morning; Lord George sang delightfully with Barbara; a charming young man he seems."

Louisa magnanimously offered to copy the music into Miss Birmingham's book. Barbara, who was thinking only of Lionel, thanked her, and kindly pressed her hand. She was in excellent spirits, and she had found time to whisper apart to Julia, that she had never been so happy in her whole life, as that day at dinner.

"My dearest friend, I feel certain that he likes me: he said nothing very particular indeed; but his whole manner was so pointed, I could not mistake it."

"Nor any one else, my dear Barbara," said Miss Mildmay with a smile. The Baroness had seen it all too, but she had also seen through Lady Birmingham's manœuvres to make them suppose that Lord George intended to be after

her daughter, which, since her Ladyship had discovered that he was likely to become an heir apparent, was what she intended to manage. Poor Louisa saw that there was a plot against her, in which, however, she wholly acquitted Barbara from having any part; but yet her heart misgave her—Lord George was so volatile, so little to be depended upon; and then he was too poor to marry at present—that, he had as good as owned to her; and if by his brother's death he should become a great man, there would be still less dependance upon his constancy. These were gloomy thoughts, which passed rapidly through her mind, as she sat on the very Turkish cushions near the fire, in the very place where Madame de Wallestein had decided that the proposal should take place. She sat carelessly enough, playing with her fan, apparently listening to some of Lady Birmingham's long uninteresting stories. How much happier was Julia, free from all cares on her own account, always ready to promote the plea-

sure of others. She was useful to every body either as a listener or a talker. She could be amused, without being provoked, by the follies of the world; she bore them with forbearance: and delighted were the Carltons and Beaulieus to pounce upon her; they could do nothing either with the Baroness or her friend; the first yawned so terribly, while the other seemed really half asleep. The party was not much improved by the arrival of Mrs. Bucannon and Miss Leslie to tea; for the officious widow immediately whispered, in a very audible tone, to Barbara:

"Well, my dear Miss Birmingham, so I find he has been here already:—upon my word he loses no time:—staid the whole morning, your mamma wrote me word, and said that he sang, and was so agreeable and chatty. Oh! you must like him."

Barbara, who was in spirits for any thing, could not help maliciously replying, "Lord Mordaunt did not pay us a very long visit this

morning, my dear madam; and he never sings, that I can answer for."

"Oh! very well, upon my word! quite sly for such a demure-looking young lady. But I was not speaking of Lord Mordaunt; I meant somebody else, who shall be nameless, but whom we shall see presently;—a word to the wise, my dear, I see, is enough." For poor Barbara looked sufficiently confused at the idea of her alluding to Lionel.

"Was Lord George Fitzallan very agreeable at dinner?" inquired Miss Leslie, next, of Miss Carlton, after having well scrutinized that young lady's dress.

"He did not dine with us," was the laconic reply.

"Dear me! did not he? how odd! Aunt Bu, do you hear?" behind Lady Margaret Carlton—"Lord George Fitzallan is not here."

"Bless me! well! I own I am astonished. Lady Birmingham wrote me word herself, that he was to be here; otherwise I declare I should

not have come out this dreadful night; but I wanted to see him."

"He was expected," said Lady Margaret Carlton with dignity, spreading out her fan; "but he never came. Lady Birmingham reckons without her host if she depends on him, I can tell her; for I have known him long."

"And so have I," replied the widow tartly; "your ladyship must excuse my totally differing with you on that head."

The impending argument was, however, prevented by the entrance of the gentlemen. The tea bustle being over, a whist-table was formed, of Lady Birmingham, Mrs. Bucannon, Lord Beaulieu, and the Archdeacon. Lady Margaret threw out so many hints, that Barbara was forced to request the Miss Carltons to give them some music. The Lady Beaulieus were in hopes of attracting Lord Hare to their side of the fireplace, but he went off to the opera. Lord Mordaunt waited to see what hopes the evening

arrangements might produce for him; but, as Lionel had contrived to place himself next to Miss Birmingham, his lordship anticipated nothing but disappointment, so, like a skilful general, he sounded a timely retreat, and took himself off. Sir Benjamin had entered into a very long story with the Baron de Wallestein; but as soon as the Baronet abandoned the firm hold he had taken of one of the Baron's buttons, the Wallestein party took their leave.

"*Oh mon Dieu, Caroline! que ces grands diners de Londres sont ennuyeux,*" said the Ambassador when they drove off.

"*Je te l'avais bien dit, mon ami,*" said his wife. "*Mon frère était le seul heureux; car pour toi, ma pauvre Louise!* Oh! I have been so indignant, my love."

"There was no occasion," said the young lady, faintly. However, she retired to her own apartment immediately; and her *papillotes* being all arranged, and Eloise dismissed, she threw herself into the arm-chair to muse upon her dis-

appointments, to philosophise on the uncertainty of all things in this world, and to agree with the preacher, " that vanity of vanities, all is vanity," till she felt so weary, that she was glad to retire to the pretty rose-coloured French bed.

Had Louisa ever read that amusing little book " Six Months in the West Indies," she might have remembered the following very judicious observation.

" If a man who can discern between the evil and the good, will consider how few pleasant dinners are to be met with in this state of existence, how chequered and uneven is his lot; upon this great point, he will do well to note, and remember, and be grateful for satisfactory entertainment."

The morning sun, however, shone brightly upon Louisa when she awoke, and Eloise appeared with smiling aspect to inform her that Madame Maradan had sent home her new hat, *qu'il était charmant, si distingué, d'un si bon gout*, and that the Baroness had sent word to inform

Mademoiselle Louise, that at St. George's church the service began at eleven o'clock.

" *Il n'y a pas de temps à perdre, Mademoiselle,*" said the Abigail, " *car il fait si beau, qu'il faut absolument faire une jolie toilette.*"

Louisa never objected to that occupation, and the Baroness was agreeably surprised when she made her appearance at breakfast *rayonnante comme le jour.* M. de Rosenval could not take his eyes off the lovely girl. " *Ne dirait-on pas que Mademoiselle est Française?*" said he.

Lionel escorted the ladies to church, as the fineness of the weather tempted them to walk; he came on purpose to breakfast in Portland Place, as he knew that the Baron and his secretary would, of course, attend their own chapel.

Not a word was said in allusion to the dinner, but Lionel looked happy in the extreme. Lady Norbury's pew was in the gallery, and Louisa was not a little surprised when Lord Mordaunt joined them, just before the service commenced; however, when she soon after perceived the Bir-

mingham party enter a pew opposite, she could then partly guess what was his lordship's attraction. Julia and Barbara immediately recognised them; and Lady Birmingham's glass was constantly applied to her eye, in hopes to find out who they could possibly be. But Louisa had presently a fresh cause for agitation, when she saw Lord George deliberately advance towards Lady Birmingham's pew, and Sir Benjamin, after shaking him cordially by the hand, make room for him, between himself and his daughter. Louisa could not but look at Colonel Montague: he seemed all composure, listening to the organ. Not so Lord Mordaunt, for he was uncommonly fidgety and absent; he sat when he should have stood, and never knelt at the proper time. Perhaps, too, he might not have been much in the habit of attending church.

At length the service commenced, it was admirably performed, and poor Louisa in a high heroic mood determined that no improper thoughts should disturb her devotions. And

during the prayers, impressively read as they were by Mr. ——, she behaved particularly well; she was perfectly satisfied with her own resolution:—but when the organ struck up its fullest, loftiest sound, could she avoid seeing Lord George look out the psalm for the day, and present it to Barbara, who smiled in return, and looked much pleased? And then as for Lord Mordaunt, he sat with his glass up, that he might observe every motion of Miss Birmingham; and Louisa heard him whisper to Lionel, "Upon my word, George seems prodigiously intimate; what think you, Montague?" But, notwithstanding this, one of Dr. Hodgson's finest sermons recalled Louisa's wandering thoughts, and she became all attention. Indeed, parts of the discourse affected her almost to tears; her attention became perfectly riveted on the preacher, and continued so till the end of the service.

When the congregation began to disperse, Lord George chaperoned Julia to the Walle-

stein party, that she might give a message from Lady Birmingham, who wished them all to come and luncheon in Regent Street. But the Baroness excused herself; she had a friend coming to see her by appointment. However, Lionel urged Louisa to accept the invitation; he would attend her! Probably he wanted an excuse for going himself. Louisa's scruples were thus over-ruled, and she joined the party, but quite *à contre cœur*, though she scarce knew why.

The order of march was as follows:—Sir Benjamin led out my Lady most lovingly; she looked broader than broad in her new black satin pelisse, and his old-fashioned spencer set off his little duck-legged fat person. They were certainly a portly, though, perhaps, not a very personable couple. Montague, by a little successful pushing and some degree of finesse, dexterously worked his way towards Barbara. He was next her, but yet he durst not offer her his arm; it might be thought indecorous: so he

was satisfied with possessing her undivided attention. The pensive Louisa followed, leaning on Julia, who could not help seeing with surprise the unusual gravity of her sister's looks, which she naturally attributed to the serious turn of reflection produced by so very fine a discourse. Lord Mordaunt somehow disappeared in the crowd; possibly he might be escorting the Baroness home; and Lord George had met such tribes of acquaintance, that they lost sight of him before they got down the stairs.

The party paraded thus down George-street into Conduit-street. Every body knows how difficult it is to make any progress upon a Sunday in London, through the streets that lead to a fashionable church or chapel, about the time that divine service ends. The crowds of people, all going the same way, oblige those behind to keep the same slow monotonous pace. Here may be seen a whole family parading in a solemn manner along the pavement, and completely filling the way. There, two or three

governesses, with a long line of young ladies in white frocks and muslin bonnets, a never-ending procession. Housekeepers and Abigails smarter than their mistresses. Ancient maidens stopping every body to talk sentimentally over the fine sermon and dear delightful preacher, exposing their sharp red noses to a cutting east wind and broiling sun,—that weather most general during a London spring. Then comes a phalanx of very fat, elderly ladies, be-bonneted, be-tippeted, be-furbelowed, dreadful to follow and hopeless to pass. A lot of fashionable dandizettes appear next, raving about the last night's opera to some of their *distingués* partners, their respective mammas following after, that they may arrange together about Kensington Gardens and the enchanting Hyde Park; the papas equally occupied in discussing the dinner of yesterday, or in anticipating the future one of to-day; the brothers on the wing for Tattersal's, big with Newmarket hopes and fears. "If one could but get out of this most

tiresome crowd!"—"Patience! patience! good people, you must make up your minds to be twice the time in getting home that you would be on any other day." On some occasions this may prove an advantage, as the Miss Mildmays just then experienced. They were obliged to proceed very slowly up Conduit-street, on account of three elderly-looking gentlewomen, of no common size, whose rustling silks completely filled up the pavement: it was impossible to pass them without going into the middle of the street, which was deplorably dirty; though the aristocratic Mac Adam, heedless of the comfort of the humble pedestrian, had not there commenced his revolutionary mania against the Glasgow granite, and thus reduced London to a state worse than that of any unpaved country town, where stilts are nearly as requisite as in the Landes near Bourdeaux. The Miss Mildmays had on bright violet-coloured *manteaux*, of beautiful French silk, denominated *sepre*. Their difficulty may be imagined. To be splashed or

draggled, oh, impossible! they could not expose themselves to such a risk; so there was no alternative but to follow the three broad old ladies *pian piano.* Then they had lost sight entirely of Sir Benjamin and Lady Birmingham, of Colonel Montague and Barbara; and what was still worse, the two gigantic footmen were following them. What would Lady Birmingham say at being deprived of her janizaries? But necessity admits of no law, and the Italian proverb is certainly a true one—

"Chi va piano,
Va sano,
Ed anche lontano."

However, just in this predicament our two young ladies were overtaken by Lords Mordaunt and George Fitzallan.

"Where are the rest of the party?" enquired the latter, "where are Lady and Miss Birmingham?"

"Gone on before," said Julia; "we missed them in the crowd."

"Ah! there they are, just at the top of the street; going to cross over."

"Pray, why did not you come to dinner yesterday?" said Louisa.

"Oh! you missed me, did you? *tant mieux* for me. Oh! I was bored to death about it. Just as I was beginning to dress, a person whom I could not possibly dismiss, came to me on very particular business: he stayed so long that I found it would be quite out of the question for me to arrive before dinner was over; so I went to the Travellers' club, and despatched a note to Lady Birmingham, to explain and apologize: I hope she got it. Do you know?"

"Oh, yes! she did certainly, and your absence was very much regretted, I can assure you."

"And, of course, I need not say how much I regretted missing you and the Wallesteins. The Baron is such a gentlemanlike, agreeable man, without any nonsense; and your friend is so amusing with her little foreign airs and affectation, and, *soit dit en passant*, so very pretty

and well dressed. Then I should have liked to see Lionel flirting at his ease, the whole of dinner-time, and all the evening too, as I hear he did. And for Sir Benjamin, poor little man! one cannot help laughing at his vulgar expressions and Punch-like appearance. His most important lady, certainly, does tire me to death: I long to say to her, 'My dear Madam, you are richer than any body, and have more servants and more fine things than any body; only don't tell me so any more, pray! and I will take it all on credit.' And then there is that odious Mrs. Bucannon, her prime minister, who tells what every thing costs. Oh! I was so tired yesterday morning of playing *personnage muet*, that I escaped to Portland-place to resume my own character. You know if I succeeded; but at least my audience were most indulgent.'

This was said with an air of triumph, which made Louisa feel very awkward. What did he mean by such extraordinary hints, such half innuendoes? What was she to understand by

such conversation? Before she had decided, the door of Birmingham-house was thrown proudly open; she left his arm, and followed the rest of the party up stairs. Lady Birmingham took her usual seat in the centre of the large sofa, supported by cushions of every dimension. Lord Mordaunt was next her ladyship, in the seat of honour; he seemed in high good-humour, practising the agreeables with all his power. Barbara was on one of the ottomans by the chimney-piece, listening to him, but looking at Colonel Montague, who sat opposite, at the end of the sofa-table. Lord George, *comme à l'ordinaire*, stood in the middle of the circle, with his back to the fire, talking to every body, joking and laughing with his usual animation; sometimes addressing himself, with much energy, to Barbara, and generally turning his back to Mrs. Bucannon and Miss Leslie, who were on the other sofa. Julia seemed as if she belonged to neither party, and yet had the cares of both; for she was in and out of the room,

opening or shutting the door, stirring the fire, or silencing Lady Birmingham's noisy parrot, or still more troublesome lapdog. Louisa hesitated whether or not she should advance; but she was not in spirits for conversation, so she determined to remain where she was. No one appeared to miss her. Lord George seemed to be the chief speaker.

"I can tell Lady Bellamont," said he, "that since she has refused my first petition about Almack's, she will not find me so accommodating as last season. You, my dear Madam," turning to Lady Birmingham, "are certain to have tickets whenever you please, from your interest with Madame de Wallestein; but at the time I applied to Lady Bellamont I did not know of that appointment. The great Lady Hauton I always feel afraid of, and so I dare say does Mordaunt, though she is his cousin: but he has certain interest with another power, Lady Rochefort, I give your Ladyship notice; remember that, Miss Birmingham, *en cas de*

besoin. Mordaunt has undisputed influence over the little Viscountess; let him deny it if he dare."

"Too ridiculous!" said Lord Mordaunt, much annoyed.

"But truth, my dear cousin, must out, *bon gré, mal gré;* I thought it necessary to prepare Miss Birmingham, lest she should have supposed you to be a disengaged man." Then, turning suddenly round to Mrs. Bucannon, Lord George continued, "I must address myself to you now, as the great manager of balls and parties. Never ask me again to dance with any of those lisping white may-poles, the Lady Hares; I proscribe them from my list of partners: they are not ornamental, and positively I will not be useful any more. Then I declare against ever handing them to the carriage from the opera, or flirting with them in that dreadful thorough draught of air in the round-room. No! I will never be pinioned by them again, or employed to leave papa's visiting-tickets along with my own, or to take vouchers for concerts,

or other public things for them :—no! no! I bar all future intimacy with the house of Hare."

Lady Birmingham laughed affectedly at his violent indignation.

" My dear Lord George, the Baronet and I feel so obliged to you for your kind intentions in favour of Barbara: but we are sure of tickets elsewhere, so that Lady Bellamont's refusal is of no consequence. I am sure you did your utmost."

" That I'll swear I did ; but the provoking thing is to find oneself of no use, to have my petition so flatly denied. But think what I did. When I found myself so provokingly prevented the pleasure of dining with you, I determined to pass the evening in doing what might be agreeable to your Ladyship and Miss Birmingham. I knew it was not Lady Bellamont's Opera-night, so I forced my way into Hill-street about tea-time. The first thing I saw was my Lord, fast asleep, in his gouty chair; Lady Jemima, whiter than white, singing some lack-a-

daisical ballad, very much out of tune, at the piano; the Countess and all the rest of her olive-branches, each more hideous one than the other, playing at sixpenny Commerce with those tiresome old twaddlers, Metcalf, who had her head tied up on account of a cold, and Miss Bevil, looking most like a mad Bacchante, with her red cheeks and still redder cap. Oh! it was a scene worthy of a painter. My *entrée* disturbed every body. I thought I would try my fate immediately: so I begged to speak a word to Lady Bellamont in private, in her *boudoir*. I vow I believe she fancied I meant to propose myself and my debts, for the acceptance of one of her giantesses. But charms so near six feet high are beyond my aim; I have no ambition of that sort. Miss Louisa!" all at once raising his voice, "why won't you join this nice little circle? there is plenty of room, and you must find it so cold by that window."

"I am very well here," was her answer, in a low, but yet a distinct voice; "I thank you."

"Well! Lady Birmingham, I stated my wishes immediately, and went to the point at once. A charming friend of mine, who meant to make London gay this season, was bringing out a most amiable young lady, her only daughter,—Miss Birmingham, to spare your modesty and save your blushes, I will not repeat my description."

"Tell him, Miss Birmingham," said Lionel, "that like a good portrait-painter, you suppose the likeness was *vraie, mais flattée.*"

"I deny that *in toto*," replied Lord George; "I endeavoured to do justice, but that is not easy: every one must allow that, who knows Miss Birmingham:" and he bowed with much gallantry, greatly to poor Barbara's confusion.

Louisa, from her corner, saw it all: the saucy smile, the courteous bow, the meaning shrug, the triumph lurking in his eye:—"Pitiful trifler!" thought she.

"But what a long story!" said Julia; "let us

come to the point at last—Lady Bellamont's answer."

"You forget," said Lord Mordaunt, sarcastically, "that the object of all story-tellers is to interest the company about themselves: the *tale*," laying a particular emphasis on the word, "is, of course, quite a secondary object."

"Your lordship, doubtless, speaks from personal experience," replied the cousin; "so I would not contradict you for the world, though I can hardly flatter myself that the latter part of your attack is deserved: I only wish it were, and that all the present company were interested about me. I include the two Miss Mildmays, though, at this moment, they choose to cut us all, and look out of the window. Well, but to proceed,—I told Lady Bellamont I depended on her promising to put down Lady and Miss Birmingham on her list for Almack's. 'Impossible! she had not the honour of visiting them.' 'That little difficulty is so soon ob-

viated, my dear Lady Bellamont. If your ladyship will give me two of your visiting-tickets, I will undertake to convey them to Lady Birmingham.' 'Impossible!' again repeated her ladyship, most dictatorially; 'she could not increase her visiting-list on any consideration whatever.' 'Lady Birmingham would wave the visiting; she was not so unconscionable as to aim at two things at once: she would be satisfied with only being admitted to Almack's' 'Impossible!' was repeated again, the third time; I then used entreaties of every description."

"Indeed, Sir!" said Barbara, raising her little soft voice louder than usual, for she was very indignant: "it was quite unnecessary; I am sorry you should have said so much, for it is a thing of no consequence whatever: I am sure I have no wish to go to Almack's."

"Softly, softly! you know nothing about it, my child."

"Not want to go to Almack's!" said Mrs.

Bucannon, holding up her hands in amazement.

"Oh, dear! you must not own such a thing for your life," said the horrified Miss Leslie.

"Then what will you say," continued the undaunted Lord George, addressing himself to Barbara, "when I confess that I had the unparalleled effrontery to pretend that I was particularly interested in your obtaining tickets; that I even went so far as to boast that I had Lady Birmingham's permission to dance with her daughter the first night of her appearance at Almack's?—Can you forgive such assurance, my dear Madam?" turning to the mother.—"To you, Miss Birmingham, I can only offer in excuse, that though what I said might be wrong, yet it was done with a good intention."

"How could you say such things, Sir?" said Barbara with much becoming spirit. "You had no right to tell such stories about any body but yourself."

"But I did not say *you* wished to dance with

me, or that you liked me, because, alas! that may not be so; but I can positively declare, upon my honour, that I wish you to like me, and that I hope to dance with you at Almack's."

Lady Birmingham was enchanted with Lord George's attentions; and Mrs. Bucannon anxiously caught at all that passed, the relation of which she knew would make her an acceptable visitor at the next party she should attend.

The groom of the chambers now made his *entrée*.

"Luncheon is ready, my Lady."

"Dear! there is a horrid knock," said Lady Birmingham, affectedly: "at home to none but very particular friends. Do you understand, Moneypenny?—to the Duke of N——, or any of that family, but to no one else. My dear Barbara, never go to the window when people knock; it looks so vulgar."

A footman entered.

"The Baroness de Wallestein has called for Miss Louisa Mildmay."

"Bless me! where has she hid herself?" said Lord George, "she is not here."

"How are you, my dear Louisa," said Julia, kindly.

"Very indifferent," replied the mortified Louisa, hiding her face with her handkerchief.

"How could you sit so long at the window?" said Lord George; "you have caught cold; but I hope you were rewarded by seeing something very interesting. Let me help to put on your shawl."

And help her he would, though she repeated twice that she wanted no assistance.

"Pray go to luncheon, Lord George; the other ladies are waiting for you. Good morning, Lady Birmingham," curtseying ceremoniously; but she held out her hand magnanimously to Barbara. "Julia, can you come to Portland-place to-morrow? I have something to say to you."

"Certainly; I will be with you early, and shall hope to find you better."

"The Baroness de Wallestein has sent to

inform Miss Louisa Mildmay that she is in haste," said Moneypenny consequentially.

"Coming, coming," said Lord George.—"But I must see you down stairs, indeed."

Lionel advanced at that moment,—"I was going to offer my services, Miss Louisa, but as Lord George—"

"If you please, then, I will take your arm," said the young lady, turning to Colonel Montague, and leaving Lord George in the middle of the room;—but he followed her down stairs.

"Planted, I declare," said Lord Mordaunt. "What say you, Miss Mildmay?"

How very differently people may feel upon the same occasion! Poor Louisa was decidedly jealous of Lord George's attentions to her friend. Lady Birmingham's exultation at the scene that had passed knew no bounds. Mrs. Bucannon visited all over the town this morning, in order to report progress. She had always set out the heiress for this handsome young Irish Lord.

CHAPTER III.

THE COMMITTEE.

"That grand Divan at Willis's,
Who oft, 'tis rumour'd, don't agree,
But clash life, law, and equity.
Some for the rules, in all their vigour,
And others to mitigate their rigour."

Advice to Julia.

Note from Miss Mildmay to her sister Louisa.

"THE morning looks so threatening, that it is doubtful my being able to walk to you early. Dear Louisa, could not you write what you have to say to me? If it is clear, Barbara and I are going to ride. Lady Birmingham hopes Madame de Wallestein will be kind enough to speak in her favour to the Almack's Committee this morning. Your head was so bad yester-

day, that I doubt whether you heard Lord George's amusing account of Lady Bellamont's peremptory refusal of his petition for Almack's tickets for the Birminghams. Lady Birmingham now depends entirely on Caroline's interest, so I hope she will exert herself for Barbara's sake.

"I hope your cold is better. Lord George was quite unhappy about you yesterday; he thought you looked so ill.

"Your affectionate Sister,

"JULIA MILDMAY."

"Birmingham House,
Monday morning.

Louisa Mildmay's Answer.

"Dear Julia,

"I am sadly disappointed that I shall not see you, for I had much to say in confidence to you alone, which it will be difficult to write.

"I have spoken to Caroline, who is going down to the committee immediately with Lady

Hauton: she desires me to say, that she will do her very utmost to oblige you.

"Now, is it possible, my dear sister, that you should not have guessed what it was that made me so miserable, yesterday? have you not observed the uncertainty, the caprice, the cruelty manifest in the conduct of a certain person? Much as I have been, nay, as I am attached to him, I am ready to resign all my pretensions at the call of friendship. But, then, what is to become of Lionel! Yet he seems quite cheerful, which I own does puzzle me. Speak but the word, and the sacrifice shall be made. Let Barbara be happy, and I shall be content to remain your disconsolate, yet most affectionate sister,

"LOUISA M——."

The writing sufficiently marked the agitation of the writer; the seal—for Louisa was one of those sentimental young ladies, whose seals are always emblems of their thoughts—was an extinguisher, and underneath were engraved these words—"*Speranza non c'è più per me.*"

The note was hardly despatched when the Baroness entered the room, more than even usually gay and brilliant. "Lady Hauton has called for me, *ma chère amie; adieu donc jusqu'à quatre heure.*"

"Pray drive as fast as possible to Willis's Rooms," said the Countess, as her footman shut the carriage-door. And her Ladyship's first-rate whip of a coachman just touched his two beautiful bits of blood, and they set-off in the highest style down Regent-street.

"I am afraid we are late, my dear Baroness, and there will be so much to do, just at the opening of the campaign. Hauton wanted to have had my carriage this morning, because he broke the spring of his chariot on Saturday-night at the door of the Opera-house, and he wished to pay a bore of a visit to his money-shop in the city to-day, in order to negotiate a fresh loan with that troublesome animal his banker; but I told him his supplies must wait till to-morrow. God knows, that's what they seldom do! But

now to business. You cannot think how delighted I am that we managed so cleverly to get you among us, my dear Madame de Wallestein; I foretell such prosperity to Almack's in consequence! You and I must manage, however, to carry things our own way. We must make a bold push for power now. I can tell you, some of the party are difficult enough to deal with; so I may as well, *chemin faisant*, give you a sketch of our leaders.

"Foremost in rank is the Duchess of Stavordale, who is as good-natured as she is fat—*c'est beaucoup dire*, you will allow—but without dignity or spirit; but she is the most popular of the Patronèsses, because she cannot be high to any body: *Enfin, c'est une mère de famille*, without fashion or pretension. She has a hundred children, and lies-in twice a-year. She is just fit for that purpose,

'To suckle fools, and chronicle small beer.'

"Then comes *La grande Marquise*, the stately

Lady Plinlimmon: her name is Marcia, and, as my friend Colonel Leach said of her,

'The lovely Marcia towers above her sex.'

Now she is to be managed by a little flattery, that oil of fools, as I once heard a man call it; she will not stoop to conquer; but by a little *finesse*, she can easily be governed. She fancies now that she leads the committee, and I leave her the credit, and so you have no idea how jealous all the others are of me. Colonel Leach always calls her Boadicea, the Cambrian queen.

"Then comes my decided opponent, the Countess of Bellamont, or "the Hare and many friends," as she is nick-named. The family name is Hare, and there is a tribe of gawky, lisping, white-haired daughters, who all hang on hand; and the mamma fancies if English country-dances were but come in again, every young puppy of fashion would be hunting the Hare down the middle. She hates me, on account of the dis-

missal of old Lady Lochaber, your predecessor. The Hares are all English to the back-bone; cannot speak a word of French, and protect every thing like a bore or a dowdy. They think dulness a virtue, I am certain; and are of that scrupulous sect who suppose that what is pleasant must always be wrong. All the grotesque figures you see at Almack's invariably belong to Lady Bellamont's list.

"My dearest friend and *confidante*, the Viscountess Rochefort, is a very different sort of being; she is a strange little thing, full of airs and graces, *spirituelle*, *caustique*, *et méchante*. She does more ill-natured things than any of us; indeed, she goes out of her way to be rude, which is bad policy. But then she carries every thing off with so high a hand, and tells it again with so much wit, that one cannot be angry with her, though she certainly does Almack's a great deal of harm. She is sister to the famous Colonel Leach, whose *bon-mots* and epigrams are in every body's mouth. Lady Rochefort has made a

most miserable marriage for her own happiness; and as she is apt to fall in love, I fear she will not end well. I shall be sorry for her, *car elle m'amuse;* but she has no forethought, unfortunately for herself; and in this world, *chacun doit penser à soi.*

"I manage all these ladies by a little tact, as thus:—I laugh and amuse the Duchess, when she is confined or nursing;—I flatter Lady Plinlimmon;—I bully Lady Bellamont;—and I scold Lady Rochefort. To you, my dear Baroness, I must speak reason, the only art I shall ever employ to convince you, should we ever disagree in opinion; which, however, I do not expect. Bless me, we are arrived! what a lot of men, to be sure, all anxiety to know their fate!"

"How d'ye do, Lady Hauton?" said a gay-looking dandy, on a very fresh horse; "I've been waiting this half-hour for you, to know what's the next process."

" Oh ! it 's Mr. Stanhope : why send up your card by Willis, as I 've told you before, and perhaps you 'll have a voucher sent down directly, or else you must call again at five o'clock."

" My dear Lady Hauton, any hopes for me ?' said a dashing young guardsman in uniform, opening the carriage-door.

" Oh ! Colonel Williams, I know you are on my list."

" Well, well ! then I will call again for my voucher: I am on guard at St. James's, so it will do capitally."

" Has your ladyship ever thought of me?" said another, who pushed Colonel Williams aside, to hand Lady Hauton from her carriage.

" Oh ! indeed, Sir Philip, I told you there was no chance ; you have had two subscriptions already. It 's positively against the rules."

" Confound those rules !' muttered Sir Philip Turner, sulkily.

"Heavens!" exclaimed Lady Hauton; "do I see Lord Hazlemere?"

His lordship approached immediately. "Will Lady Rochefort be here?" enquired he, with some anxiety.

"I should suppose, of course," replied the Countess; "but why so anxious?"

"I wrote to her about a subscription for Lady Glenmore. Will you see about it, dear Lady Hauton?"

"Oh! is that all?" said her ladyship satirically; "leave it to me. Come, my dear Madame de Wallestein, we must wait no longer, positively."

"*Qui est donc ce Monsieur à la porte?*" enquired the Baroness.

"Oh! that is Mr. Willis," said Lady Hauton. Then, turning to this very important official person, her ladyship added,

"I am afraid we are very late this morning?"

"Yes, my lady; the other members of the

committee have all been assembled some time, and are already engaged in business."

"Dear, I am quite shocked! Let my books and baskets be brought into the committee-room directly. Come, my dear Madame de Wallestein, take my arm. But stop! stop! Mr. Willis, this lady is the Baroness de Wallestein, the Austrian ambassadress, the new lady patroness in the room of Lady Lochaber."

Mr. Willis, the elder, we believe, bowed long and low to each of these mighty titles of honour. We really should not have presumed to introduce this gentleman's name into print, had not the example been set us by the Muse of Almack's, whose footsteps we are proud to follow at humble distance, if simple prose may thus venture to imitate the flights of poetic fancy, in something the like manner as a modest one-horse chaise will, on Newmarket Heath, adventurously pursue the well-appointed barouche and four of some proud leader of the turf.

Thus we have been inspired by that display of Luttrell's genius, in depicting his "taste for the very highest life."

He opens Almack's in the following manner :–

> "But see approach, with looks so sinister,
> Willis, their Excellencies' minister."

We can declare, upon our honour, that on this memorable morning, instead of sinister, his looks were most smiling whenever Lady Hauton spoke to him.

The *portes battantes* of the committee-room were now thrown open ; the board of red cloth were all assembled. The ladies sat round a large table, covered with a scarlet tapis, each with her desk before her, on which reposed the books of fate. Mr. Plume, the secretary, was a little behind the ladies, with a small table before him. On benches in front sat several ladies, who came as petitioners for themselves or their friends. On a board over the chimney-piece were inscribed the following sentences, which

Colonel Leach had termed the laws of the Medes and Persians:

"ALMACK'S.

"RULES.

"No lady patroness can give a subscription, or a ticket, to a lady she does not visit, or to a gentleman who is not introduced to her by a lady who is on her visiting list.

"No more than three ladies of a family are to be upon the ladies' lists.

"No lady's or gentleman's name can continue on the list of the same lady patroness for more than two sets of balls; but ladies are not to consider themselves entitled to the second set of balls, unless it is stipulated on their subscribing to the first, and no lady or gentleman can have more than six tickets from the same lady, during the season.

"No application from ladies to procure tickets for other ladies, or from gentlemen, for ladies or gentlemen's tickets, can be attended to.

"No gentleman's tickets can be transferred. Ladies tickets are only to be transferred from mother to daughter, or between unmarried sisters.

"Subscribers who are prevented from coming are requested to give notice to the ladies patronesses, the day of the ball, by two o'clock, directed to Willis's rooms, that the ladies may fill up the vacancies.

"The ladies patronesses request that applications for subscriptions and tickets may be sent to Willis's

Rooms, and not to their houses, in consequence of the confusion that arises from notes being lost and mislaid.

"In consequence of the numerous applications from families whom the ladies patronesses cannot accommodate with tickets, they are obliged to make a positive rule, that not more than three ladies in a family can be admitted to any ball.

"The subscribers are most respectfully informed, that the rooms will be lighted up by ten o'clock, and, by orders from the ladies patronesses, no person can possibly be admitted after half past eleven o'clock; except Members of both Houses of Parliament, who may be detained *at the House* on business.

"Applications for new subscribers must be submitted for the concurrence of all the ladies patronesses."

"*King Street, April* 6, 182 . .

"Signed.—Marcia Stavordale,
Emily Plinlimmon,
Charlotte Bellamont,
Georgiana Hauton,
Arabella Rochefort,
Caroline de Wallestein."

The new patroness was received with the utmost distinction: all the privy council rose at once to welcome her; she was handed to her seat by the secretary, the obsequious Mr. Plume. The fair legislators then resumed their places; and the order of the day was called for.

Lady Hauton put up her glass, to discover her acquaintance among the ladies who were whispering on the opposite bench: she soon caught the eye of Miss Bevil, who, in a crimson pelisse, and a bonnet of the same dashing hue, her cheeks a tint deeper, looked all bustle and agitation.

"My dear Lady Hauton! how do *you* do? am glad to find your cold has not prevented *you* coming; I began to be in a fright lest *you* should not attend, which would have quite undone me."

"And whom are you come begging for?" enquired Lady Hauton.

"Oh! a very smart young lady, who will be much admired, I am sure; Miss Trecosey of St. Michael's Mount—a pretty cousin of mine."

"What! a Cornish chough, I suppose," said Lady Rochefort sharply; "for I remember Walter Scott's proverb, says

'By Pol, Tre, and Pen,
You may know the Cornishmen.'

But who knows her, pray?"

"Not I," said the Duchess of Stavordale, laughing; "I don't think I can reproach myself with having any acquaintance so near the Land's-end. But probably Lady Plinlimmon may know her, as a countrywoman."

"Tre–madoc, and Tre–vanion, and Tre–fusis, I know," said the Marchioness of Plinlimmon, in a slow stately manner; "but Tre–cosey I know nothing about."

"Oh! and Tremaine, the man of refinement, you must know him too; for I think he must be from Cornwall, though his biographer has chosen to transplant him into Yorkshire," said Lady Hauton.

"Poor dear Miss Bevil!" said Lady Bellamont with a lisp; "I am afraid this Miss with the tre–mendous name has not much chance."

"'Faint heart never won fair lady yet,'" said the undaunted Miss Bevil. "Miss Trecosey is coming to stay some time with me in town; her name will be on my visiting tickets, therefore she will be known to you, Lady Hauton, and to

Lady Rochefort, and to Madame de Wallestein: those are her three pleas for admission. Well, then, of course you will be anxious to have the beautiful Lady Beaulieus among your Almack's *belles*, and Lord Beaulieu, dear good man that he is, has made a point that I should chaperon his daughters." She paused; a sort of smile was visible on the countenances of most of the ladies.

Miss Bevil resumed, "Think how hard it will be on poor Bridget Trecosey, if she is to stay at home while I go out: Madame la Baronne, did you bring my note with you?"

"*Oui, oui*," said Madame de Wallestein, "*le billet et le portrait aussi;*" and she produced a beautiful miniature, with a note on rose-coloured paper.

"A striking likeness, I suppose, of your *protegée*," said Lady Hauton, laughing; "upon my word, a pretty girl. And does she mean to honour us with this black velvet cap too? Why she will be quite a lion, I protest!"

A good deal of whispering and tittering took place among the ladies: at last Lady Hauton said—

"Take back your pretty miniature, my dear Miss Bevil; if we agree to admit Miss Trecosey, you will have a voucher sent to you."

"Pray remember that there are hundreds of petitioners with better claims," said Lady Rochefort, with a toss of her little head.

"Now, Mrs. Bucannon," said Lady Hauton, "what do you want?"

"The favour of the Baroness de Wallestein's interest, in behalf of my niece, Miss Jane Leslie."

"But there must be some mistake," said the Baroness mildly; "I have not the pleasure of knowing the young lady."

"Oh, my dear madam, I dare say you have forgotten it; very probably: or perhaps you are very short-sighted: but Jane and I had the honour of being introduced to you by Lady Birmingham last week."

"I remember seeing you with her: but that does not make an acquaintance, does it?"

"This will never do, Mrs. Bucannon," said Lady Hauton; "it is a very irregular proceeding to come here to disturb the committee in this way, in the midst of business, and to take advantage of Madame de Wallestein's being lately come to this country, in order to force your acquaintance upon her. You were on Lady Lochaber's lists, I remember; and you and Miss Leslie have already had one set this year, which ought to satisfy you both; so you will get nothing by staying: and we must have no farther interruptions at present. And therefore I request the other ladies will also withdraw."

The indignant Mrs. Bucannon was forced to obey; she was followed by several other petitioners, all much enraged at this sudden display of power.

"We might as well have heard what those

other ladies wanted," said Lady Bellamont, "after they had waited so long."

"Oh! there will be no end of it, if once people are allowed to intrude into the committee-room," said Lady Hauton angrily; "I shall desire Willis to stop every body from coming in."

The door was just then slowly opened, and a very elegant pink satin hat, with *pleureuses* feathers, presented itself.

"Nobody must come in!" said Lady Hauton.

"Oh! don't be so barbarous! Only one word, for pity sake!" said the insinuating Mrs. Sydenham.

"Indeed," said Lady Rochefort, "Lady Hauton cannot break through the rules; you must go away;" waving her hand.

"Mercy, mercy! gentle ladies," said Mrs. Sydenham; "only one word: I have been up to Connaught Place, to speak to dear Lady

Hauton, and I was just too late; so I ventured to follow her here."

"Despatch, if you please," said Lady Plinlimmon, magisterially; "Whom do you petition for?"

"The Honourable Mr. Dabster," said Mrs. Sydenham.

"The Honourable Mr. Dabster!" repeated Lady Hauton, "Heavens! what a name! pray, whose son is he?"

"He is son to old Lord Puckeridge; but he has lately changed his name, on succeeding to a fortune, left him by his uncle Dabster," said Mrs. Sydenham. "I own it is an unfortunate name, but he is a very handsome young man, and it will be a thousand pities if he should not be well introduced: with so many advantages, that would complete him."

"Does your grace know him?" said Lady Hauton to the Duchess of Stavordale.

"Not I, indeed! I have heard of old Lord

Puckeridge, a strange, absurd creature. It's a disputed title, too; perhaps Lady Bellamont may know the family?"

"I have heard of the Dabsters, as great rich city brokers; that is all I can tell you about them. I have no city connexions, thank God! What says Lady Rochefort?"

This was a cut at the little Viscountess; whose mother had been a city heiress, and whose sarcasms had often wounded Lady Bellamont to the quick.

"I know nothing either of Puckeridges or Dabsters," said Lady Rochefort; "their names are enough for me."

"And I never even heard of them before," said Lady Plinlimmon.

"Well, then," said Lady Hauton, "as Madame de Wallestein cannot possibly know this man, he is a stranger to us all; and cannot, therefore, be a proper person to be admitted. I am sorry for your *protégé*, Mrs. Sydenham, but it cannot be helped."

"Poor man!" said the lady, with an affected sigh; "but another year, probably, when he is better known, his prospects will be better appreciated." She curtsied gracefully, and withdrew.

"And now to business," said Lady Hauton. "Where is your list, my dear Baroness?"

"Here are my papers," said Madame de Wallestein; "I have made two lists: the first is, of all those who appear to have been promised by Lady Lochaber; and the second, of all the new applicants, *Les billets sont tous dans le panier, vous savez bien que je ne connais personne.*"

"Well! let us see,—Townshend, Walpole, Graham, Clinton, Winyard. Oh! those are all old stagers, and must be entered of course; but where is the new list?"

"There! that is it in your hand, *là voyez!*"

"Young!—oh, I know them well: regular London-antiques. Like old tapestry, faded, yet every one appreciates their value; therefore put them

down; Mrs. and two Miss Youngs. Lambton, Mrs. and Miss,—what! the card-playing widow with the tall daughter:—but they may do. Ramsays, the Misses—oh! they 're cousins of that odious Lady Lochaber's, so I shall scratch them out."

"They are handsome girls, I think," said the Duchess.

"And nearly related to the Duke of Clanalpin," said Lady Bellamont, with infinite *sang-froid.*

"And excellent harp-players," observed the musical Lady Plinlimmon.

"Well, then, to the point at once," said Lady Hauton. "Are the accomplished Miss Ramsays to be invited? Madame de Wallestein, you must give your opinion."

"Oh! then, pray let us have these musical Misses."

"Miss Geraldine de Montmorenci comes next. What a sweet pretty novelist name! who is she?"

"A beautiful Irish girl, who was often with me at Paris," said the Baroness.

"Oh dear!" said Lady Hauton, "what a falling off. I hoped she had been of the family *du premier baron Chrétien;* what Madame de Staël calls '*une des grandes familles historiques de l'Europe.*'"

"*Elle est bien belle,*" said Madame de Wallestein; "quite a wild Irish girl."

"Oh, how delightful! the very thing to take. Pray set her name down," said Lady Hauton. "Then we have next, the Lady Margaret Carlton, and the two Misses Carltons."

"So they have left off applying to me," said Lady Plinlimmon, "which I am rather glad of, for I do not admire any of the race. Such proud, stiff, disagreeable people! Lady Margaret has all the Clanalpin pride about her. Shall we have them?"

"What say you, Lady Bellamont?" said the Duchess of Stavordale.

"Oh! for one subscription, I think we may admit them."

"Mr. Adolphus Frederick Carlton is on my list," said Lady Rochefort; "he is a tall spindle-shanks of a youth, but he is a *protégé* of one of the royal dukes, and an inimitable waltzer."

"Then he will do," said the Duchess; "for good dancers, I am sure, are always acceptable."

"Colonel, Mrs., and Miss Smythe," said Lady Hauton. "Who on earth can they be, I wonder?"

"That broad name of Smith covers such a multitude of sins," said the still broader Duchess of Stavordale.

"Oh! but these people are distinguished by a *y*, and a final *e* to their name. They are Lincolnshire people, and applied to me last year, but they were too late," said Lady Rochefort.

"There is no need to have Colonel Smythe, at least," said Lady Hauton, "even if we agree to the wife and daughter, for papas are of no use. What is the girl like?"

"Well-looking, and well-dressed," said Lady Rochefort.

"About what age?"

"Oh! under twenty, certainly; has been brought up abroad."

"Has she much *tournure?*"

"Quite Parisian."

"Dances well?"

"In perfection: I can assure your ladyship she is a *distinguée.*

"And nothing disgraceful-looking about the mother?"

"Quite the contrary; a very fashionable-looking chaperon, *d'un certain age,* with a Frenchified cap, and a large Indian shawl."

"Oh! very well! then we will have them.

"Who comes next? Sir George, Lady, and two Miss Cottons. Who and what are they?"

"Oh! I know them," said Lady Rochefort: "positively I bar them and the Balls. I will not be worsted by them this year, though they did overturn all my plans last season. They got on your list, Lady Bellamont."

"I think I remember them now," said her Ladyship of Hauton: "Two vastly odd-looking little girls, in dirty striped red gowns. I will not admit them on my books again, that 's poz."

"But I have promised them," said Lady Bellamont.

"Oh! never mind: break your promise; but don't let us have such shabby girls, with their ugly mamma, and that gouty old gentleman:—too much of a good thing by half."

"Lord and Lady Glenmore have written to me," said Lady Plinlimmon: "No, no! I see it is Lord and Lady Luxmore."

"Oh! admit them, of course," replied Lady Hauton; "but Lady Rochefort, I think, was applied to for Lady Glenmore."

"Yes, that I was," returned the Viscountess. "Lord Hazlemere came to me about it; he was anxious in the extreme to please his aunt."

"What! the beautiful Rosa Danvers?" said the Duchess; "she will be an object of great

attraction everywhere, from her youth, and the oddity of her marriage with so old a man. We must certainly have her."

"The Ladies Buller," said Lady Bellamont, are the next.

"Oh! refuse them," said Lady Hauton, "till they get some new turbans; those things they wear look so very strange."

"I think your ladyship makes a point of refusing every body I propose!" said Lady Bellamont, rather tartly.

"Why, you always show up such a list of worthies," said Lady Hauton. "Almack's would be a mere receptacle for quizzes, if we admitted all your friends."

Lady Bellamont looked furiously angry, particularly as Lady Rochefort joined in the laugh against her and her *protégées*.

"I think," said the Duchess, "we behave very ill to Madame de Wallestein; for this debate cannot be very amusing to her. Perhaps she may have some friend to propose?"

"Your grace is very kind," returned the Baroness; "I was just going to name Lady and Miss Birmingham, and Miss Mildmay."

A look of dismay pervaded every face.

"What! the great Pitt man's wife and daughter," said Lady Rochefort.

"I never heard that Sir Benjamin Birmingham was a Pitt man," replied Madame de Wallestein; "he was formerly a great West India merchant, and he is now tenant to my brother, Sir Edmund Montague, for Atherford Abbey. I promised to send them vouchers:—my word is engaged."

"And Miss Mildmay; that is your pretty friend, of course?

"*Pardonnez moi, c'est sa sœur*," said the Baroness.

"And is she as handsome as the one who is staying with you?"

"Oh, no! certainly not; but she is extremely amiable."

"Oh! *cela va sans dire*," said Lady Roche-

fort. "Ugly girls must be amiable to pass; but, as these Miss Mildmays are quite unknown to us, I think it will be very liberal if we admit one of them, and, of course, the beauty. What say you, Lady Plinlimmon?"

"Why, certainly; but yet, as the Baroness de Wallestein's friends—"

"But, you know," said Lady Rochefort, "Lady Hauton always says that friendship must be entirely done away with in these cases."

"The Miss Mildmays I know nothing about," said the Duchess; "but I am sure the Birminghams are not desirable. My friend Lady Norbury was hoping only yesterday, that they might be excluded; because, if money was once to get people into Almack's, there would be an end directly to all hope of its continuing good company."

"Lady Birmingham is very vulgar, *assurément*," said the Baroness: "but her daughter is a charming person, and *du meilleur ton*."

"Her pedigree must, however, be always a

great objection," said Lady Rochefort; "and to you, Madame de Wallestein, who have always frequented the best society on the Continent—"

"Are any of the Birminghams city people?" enquired Lady Bellamont.

The Viscountess coloured, and looked very angry.

"This is too absurd, really," said Lady Hauton, with her usual air of superiority. "What useless nicety! with the fortune Miss Birmingham will inherit, there is no rank in the peerage to which she may not aspire: methinks it would be wiser to make up to her."

"Make up to a Birmingham! good Heavens! what degradation!" exclaimed the incensed matrons, in chorus.

"*Je suis fachée, on ne peut plus, d'être la cause de cette petite discussion, mais j'ai promise à mes amies, et il faut, ou que j'acquitte ma parole, ou que je cède ma place.*"

"Impossible, my dear Madame de Wallestein; such a thing must not even be thought

of. Lady and Miss Birmingham *shall* be admitted," said Lady Hauton.

"Then, if they are to have vouchers, I must insist on my friends the Tooleys being accepted also," said Lady Bellamont.

"Oh, keep them for the next subscription; don't let us monopolize all the Lions for the same set. And really the Tooleys ought not to be named with the Birminghams; they are very commonplace humdrums, while the others are certainly, though secondary stars, yet of great brilliancy. Rich gilding will always attract. We shall all live to see Lady Birmingham, and her house, and her parties, decided *ton*; for what will not gold buy in these days?—rank, power, fashion, nay, even consideration. In this mercantile age, Birmingham is likely to become the emporium of trade.

> Money gives influence, and wins the prize
> Of taste and wit, while all contend
> To win her smiles whom all commend.

I shall prove a true prophetess, you will see;

qu'en dites-vous, ma chère amie?" turning to the Baroness.

"Indeed, I think Miss Birmingham will be admired for herself alone. She hardly wants the gilding you talk of."

"If we are to yield," said Lady Plinlimmon, "perhaps the less we say the better."

"Mercantile influence then, it seems, is to carry all before it," said the Duchess, "in fashion as well as in politics, and under aristocratic patronage too!"

"*C'est la marche du siècle*," said Lady Hauton. "So then it is decided, Madame de Wallestein; the Birminghams are to have vouchers."

"I will not give up," said Lady Bellamont, angrily, "I beg to observe, that I do not agree to their admission."

"Unluckily, your ladyship's single vote against five will not do much; I fear the ayes have it," said Lady Hauton, with a smile. "Suppose you enter a dissentient protest in the journal of our proceedings; it would prove to

after-ages the incorruptibility of the house of Hare—proof against gold in any shape;—though a little, it is well known, might be very acceptable," whispered her ladyship to her friend Lady Rochefort.

"Well," said the Duchess, "let us proceed; we have staid long enough at Birmingham to have doubled our capital; yet that is not the case, for my stock of men is very low indeed."

"My list is quite full," said Lady Rochefort; "but nothing new. Lady Plinlimmon and Lady Bellamont were both rather deficient in those most indispensable necessaries."

"So much hunting still going on in the country!" was observed, in various tones, but all pathetic ones.

Lady Hauton then presented a number of visiting tickets. Sundry young lordlings were all approved of *nem. con.* Indeed, "the Countess," as her ladyship was usually denominated, was so very despotic, that no one ventured to disapprove of any person she protected. The

Baroness then read over a list of French and German Marquises, Counts, and Chevaliers, with here and there one or two Italian Princes or Dues, who had applied to her.

Lady Hauton was delighted: such a great foreign connexion must prove of infinite advantage to the society: it was opening Almack's to the Continent; it was strengthening the coalition by an alliance with foreign powers.

Mr. Willis now entered with an important air, and placed a visiting ticket before Lady Hauton—"The gentleman will call again for his answer, my Lady." The name was

"The Earl of Killarney."

"Bless me! is he returned from the Continent?" exclaimed Lady Hauton. "Well! I am astonished! How many people must have been surprised at his appearance! I heard he was dying."

"The most celebrated *roué* in Europe," said Lady Rochefort; "really a man of note."

"I have often heard of him formerly," said the Duchess, "when he made himself so conspicuous. A very dangerous man, I have always understood; I never knew him."

"I ordered my doors to be shut against him," said the dignified Lady Plinlimmon, "when he was last in England."

"A decision worthy of your ladyship's character," said Lady Bellamont. "Lord Killarney is a man against whom my face will always be set. We should all unite to discourage so notorious a profligate."

"Poor man!" exclaimed Lady Hauton, "how grieved he will be to find that your ladyship is become perpetual president of the Society for the Suppression of Vice."

"I did not know before," said Lady Rochefort, "that this committee was a moral tribunal. I fear, in future, we shall have nothing to do but to reject."

"To be sure," replied the Duchess, "there may be something in that. Let me see, what

are Lord Killarney's offences? Some few years ago, he wanted to run off with that pretty Mrs. Sutton. Well, and he was not the first person she had been talked of about, if I remember right."

Madame de Wallestein, from prudence, said nothing. She did not wish to appear interested in the debate; but the name of Killarney brought a thousand melancholy recollections to her mind. It was he who had first misled her brother Edmund, to whose pernicious example most of his follies might be attributed; nay, he was even supposed to have been the adviser of his disgraceful marriage. She sighed, as all these unpleasant remembrances passed through her mind.

The other ladies were all so much interested in their debate, that they did not observe her change of countenance.

"Where can one possibly stop?" said Lady Hauton: "it would be morally impossible to draw a line about men. For instance, if we were

to reject Lord Killarney, how could we admit that Mr. Wentworth, who ran off with Lady Browne; or Sir Charles Thetwood, who had that affair with Mrs. O'Connor; or Colonel Selwyn, who was so talked about with little Lady Lucy Bellairs; or Lord Delacour, who is at this very moment suspected—"

"Hush! hush! my dear Lady Hauton, you really grow too scandalous," interposed the Duchess. "I have no objection whatever to Lord Killarney: he is become so famous, or infamous, that I have little chance of seeing him any where, unless he gets admitted to Almack's; and I have lived so long in the world, that a little agreeable vice does not frighten me. Don't let us rake up old stories. Lord Killarney has been a long time abroad."

"Perhaps it is only common charity," said Lady Plinlimmon, "to hope that he may be a reformed rake."

"I do not believe in such a thing," said Lady Bellamont.

"Oh! let us be merciful, and admit him," said the Duchess; "if he behaves ill again, I shall have nothing more to say to him."

Mr. Willis now opened the door.

"Lady Anne Norbury wishes to speak to Lady Hauton."

"Come in, come in, Anne; but who is your cavalier—has he no name?"

And all the near-sighted patronesses put up their glasses.

"He must announce himself, and give in his own credentials," said Lady Anne, "for I never asked him to come in. I found him at the door with that handsome Augustus Carrington; and I must tell you what that dandy said: he told Willis to take up his ticket, and bid the lady patronesses fight for it."

"He shall not be admitted then, for this insolence," said one and all the fair legislators.

"Oh! most august tribunal," exclaimed the gentleman who had followed in Lady Anne

Norbury, and who now came forward bowing with an air of the most profound humility:—"Ye rulers of the world of fashion, under whose patronage amusement reigns triumphant, accept the homage of one of your most devoted slaves."

"And what want you here, most gallant son of Mars?" said Lady Hauton, in the same tone of banter.

"To express my admiration, to tell you all in the words of the inimitable Sheridan, in the Critic, that 'It is a pleasure to see how you enjoy your volunteer fatigue, and your solicited solicitations.' I wish also to be permitted to admire the new flower that has just appeared to grace the Almack's parterre; the celebrated imperial rose, of whose bloom and glory we have all heard so much," said this most metaphorical man.

"Madame de Wallestein," said Lady Hauton, "I perceive that this visit is intended for

you; I must present this gentleman to you in form. Madame la Baronne must permit me to make known to her the celebrated Colonel Leach, of witty renown."

"Yes," said the Duchess, "the George Selwyn of the day needs no farther introduction than his name."

"Lady Anne Norbury, protect me," said the wit. "My dear ladies, spare my blushes; you overpower my modesty."

"I thought that had disappeared long ago," said Lady Rochefort; "but what do you want, Harry? Pray, Lady Anne, what favour has he got to ask? What is he come for?"

"To tell you all a grand discovery he has made; to give you the pedigree of Almack's; for which secret, he will expect a reward, of course."

"Even so," said Colonel Leach. "Hear from what little beginnings mighty factions arise. The agreeable Horace Walpole thus describes the commencement of this association,

and, taking a paper from his pocket, he read as follows:—

"There is a new institution that begins to make, and if it proceeds, will make, a considerable noise. It is a club of both sexes, to be erected at Almack's, on the mode of that of the men of White's. Mrs. Fitzroy, Lady Pembroke, Mrs. Reynell, and Miss Lloyd, are the foundresses."

"And now, ladies, I beg ten thousand pardons for my intrusion: had not Lady Anne encouraged me, I should never have had the face to break in upon your privy council."

"I like that," said Lady Hauton: "you of all birds in the air to pretend to want face! why, certainly, yours has long been made of brass."

"Your ladyship is too complimentary. But I see Lady Anne's communications are all made *sotto voce:* I always suspect treason among whispering ladies, particularly at Almack's; and you women of Willis's are as well known as the

men at White's, for the severity of your criticisms. But I am sorry to have to announce an attack made upon you by one of the bold spirits of this daring age, when nothing can escape the licentiousness of the public prints."

"What can be coming next!" said Lady Hauton, with much curiosity.

The Colonel deliberately took a newspaper from his pocket, and read as follows:—

"WHO does not know that the ladies patronesses of Almack's have interdicted pantaloons, tight or loose, at their assemblies?

'We have seen a MS. instruction, which, alas! never was printed, from the mighty conclave, announcing their *fiat* in these words.

'Gentlemen will not be admitted *without breeches and stockings*.'

"No sooner was this mandate (in whatever terms the published one was couched) fulminated from King Street, 'than the lean and slippered pantaloon' was exterminated, and as

the directresses directed, 'short hose' were the order of the day.

"If the same lovely and honourable ladies were to take the Opera House under their purifying controul, and issue, in the same spirit at least, an order that ladies were not to be admitted to appear without—— (whatever may be the proper name for the drapery of females), we are quite convinced that they would render a great service to society, and extricate the national character from a reproach which the tacit endurance of such grossnesses has, in the hands of all moderate people, unfortunately cast upon us."——

"What abominable impertinence," said Lady Bellamont, bridling up with dignity.

"Is there no stopping that Theophilus Cope's pen," said Lady Rochefort.

"Ask him to one of your *petits soupers*, Lady Hauton," said Colonel Leach with a sneer. "He is always very fond of you."

"That would be bribery and corruption with a vengeance," said the Countess; "I shall think better of it. So now to business."

"Perhaps you are not aware," said Lady Anne, "that Colonel Leach came here to petition in favour of a very young and interesting lady; but he would not tell me the name of his *protégée*."

"For a very good reason too," replied the Colonel; "Lady Anne herself refused to inform me, who is the happy man for whom she is exerting her interest."

"*Mais c'est tout juste, il me semble*," said the Baroness; "*l'un vaut l'autre*."

"Pray, Lady Anne, open the *séance*," said the Colonel.

"Oh!" replied her ladyship, "that is soon done, for I am come here only as *chargée d'affaires* from my mother, to ask Lady Hauton if my cousin Lord Killarney is on her list."

"I have just proposed him, Anne, and, after

a sharp fight with my colleagues, I have succeeded in his favour."

"It would have been strange to have rejected the gallant gay Killarney," said Colonel Leach —"the very soul of pleasure, the favourite of the fair; it would have been a proceeding unworthy the ladies of Willis's."

"Now, if you dare to call us by that name again, Harry, we will blackball you directly," said Lady Rochefort.

"Killarney is mad for *écarté*, I hear," said Colonel Leach. "Lady Hauton! I hope we are to have card-tables in the small room."

"*Comment!*" said Madame de Wallestein: "*est-ce qu'il n'y a pas toujours des tables de jeu! Une société sans écarté!*"

"Must be a trick, my dear Madam, as *un jardin sans parterre, ou un parterre sans roses*, to use the words of the gallant Francis the First, of France. But you must know that hitherto *écarté* has been proscribed at Almack's."

"And as long as I am a lady patroness," said Lady Bellamont, "*écarté* shall not be introduced. I would rather follow the steps of poor dear Lady Lochaber, and resign directly, than sign the ruin of half the *young men about town*."

"I am quite of your ladyship's opinion," said the Duchess; "I know too much of the misery occasioned by play."

"We all do that," said Lady Plinlimmon; "and to me, who have sons just coming out, it is of great importance; indeed, one cannot be too careful; I decidedly oppose *écarté*."

"Then we are three and three," said Lady Hauton, "for, as my boys are quite young, I do not feel it necessary to sacrifice the pleasures of the present day for the sake of the future; it would be too absurd: they may have no turn for gambling; or, if they have, I may not live to see it. Let the future take care of itself."

"And as men must see play wherever they go," said Lady Rochefort, "they had better

be accustomed to it early; and why not at Almack's as well as every where else?"

"Can you conceive such folly," whispered Lady Bellamont to Madame de Wallestein, "when every body knows that Lord Rochefort is ruining himself by play?"

"But, ladies fair," said Colonel Leach, "if this debate proceeds, I shall say in the words of my friend Sheridan:

'Pangs such as these the Maccaroni racks,
When calm he dates the downfall of Almack's.'

"Without *écarté* you will have no men, at least none of *la haute volée;* they will all follow the steps of Mesdames Hauton, Rochefort, and Wallestein, and all the agreeables will fly to *écarté*, and leave your famous Almack's."

"How ridiculous this must appear to Madame de Wallestein, to whom the idea of *écarté* must be so familiar!"

"*Il est vrai*," said the Baroness: "*dans le grand monde je croyais que la société et le jeu allaient toujours ensemble.*"

"But we are such a moral people, that we must not even be led into temptation. Our young men may go to Paris to ruin themselves at the *salon, à la bonne heure;* and if all pleasures are prohibited here, that must happen of course."

"Now," said the Duchess, "my dear Lady Hauton, you must feel that you are wrong. To introduce play at such a large assembly as Almack's can never be wise. If you had a son grown up, you would see it in a different light yourself."

"Not at all; I would have the gang of card-players there, and every where, to make a variety; we might nickname them the banditti, and I would be their leader. Gang is such an old name; it would do for Colonel Leach and his Lord Orford; it wants only the faro tables, that I have heard Lady Norbury talk about by the hour, when she has been speaking of the delights of prohibited pleasures, and contraband silks."

"If card-tables were introduced at Almack's, the girls would lose all their partners," said the Duchess; "for men would always rather play than dance. The young ladies will not approve of this innovation."

"Suppose," said Lady Hauton, "we agree to Lady Bellamont's proposal for having English country-dances in turns with quadrilles; that, you know, would be her way to marry all the girls, and whilst they were flirting and romping in their kitchen hops, surely the poor chaperons might be permitted to indulge in a little innocent *écarté*."

"Never, never!" said Lady Bellamont, "I would sooner give up all the country-dances in the world, than allow play at Almack's; and the end of it would be, Lady Hauton, that all the desirable young men would follow you and your party, and the poor girls would be merely a refuge for the destitute."

"A prey to inflictionaries," said Colonel

Leach with a laugh, "while the hopes of the nation would be willing captives in her ladyship's preserve."

"Well, if I must yield," said Lady Hauton, "I cannot help myself; but it is against my better judgment, I can assure you."

"Let us *finasser* a little," said Lady Rochefort to the Countess in a whisper, "*il faut reculer pour mieux sauter, et puis nous irons notre train.*"

"*Nous verrons*," said Lady Hauton.

"*C'est, donc, décidé*," said the Baroness.

"Pray," asked Colonel Leach, "is the dasher Lady Stanton to be admitted? There is great anxiety out of doors to know; I have been asked repeatedly."

"Then you may say, certainly not," said the rigid Lady Bellamont. "Such an abominable woman!"

"Oh, she is too bad!" said Lady Plinlimmon, haughtily.

"So thoroughly barefaced!" said the Duchess of Stavordale.

"And so impertinent!" said Lady Rochefort, with a toss.

"And so much too handsome!" said Lady Hauton with a laugh, "that we are all jealous of her."

"Then, what shall you do with Lord St. Ives?" asked the Colonel.

"Do with him?" said Lady Hauton, "why, what does the man mean? what would you have us do with him? leave him to his fate, to be sure. I could say of him as Charles Fox said of Lady Melbourne: "With Saint Ives, I would nothing do."

"Then you will none of you be asked to his grand *fête* at Kensington in May, when the gardens are to be thrown open, and all the charity children in London are to be admitted to the *jouissance* of the fresh air, and to parade about in fancy dresses."

" I care neither for Lord St. Ives or his *fêtes*," said Lady Hauton: " he may leave me out of all his balls, his concerts, his theatricals, and his breakfasts; but Lady Stanton shall not be admitted to Almack's, that is positive."

" And now," exclaimed the Colonel, " perhaps this will be the favourable moment for me to offer up my own petition. It is in behalf of a young lady,—a very young, handsome, and distinguished lady, I assure you."

" Unless she is on the visiting-book of one of the ladies patronesses," said Lady Hauton. " it is of no use talking about her, for it is against the rules."

" But my *protégée* has the honour of being well-known to Madame la Baronne de Wallestein."

" And what is she like?" asked Lady Hauton.

" Why, what should a young lady be like, but an angel? Little Tommy Moore would call her the Love of the Angels. And then she is as rich as a Peruvian Princess: and, moreover, I

pronounce her to be both amiable and *aimable!* Now, in the name of wonder, what can you want more, than to patronize so much perfection?"

"And the name of this goddess?"

"Oh, her name is not worthy of her, I must acknowledge; but then she may change it, whenever she pleases, for a better: her name is Birmingham."

"Heavens!" exclaimed Lady Plinlimmon, "do I live to hear Colonel Leach a supplicant for the house of Birmingham?"

"I should not have supposed," said Lady Rochefort, "that my brother would even have known such people."

"And yet," replied the undaunted Colonel, "I come a delegate from the Guards' club, to hope that the Ladies Patronesses will not be so cruel to all the younger brothers, as to cut them off from this their best hope of preferment. The rejection of so great an heiress as Miss Birmingham would be a death-blow to us."

"Go back to your constituents," said Lady

Hauton with dignity, "and tell them, that, thanks to the liberal ideas entertained by Madame de Wallestein and your humble servant, the golden goddess of the house of Birmingham will be permitted to shed her radiance over the patrician world of Almack's, on Wednesday next. Send Willis here.—Oh, Willis, my list is all made out: Mr. Plume may send the vouchers for me to sign, and he must take care of the tickets afterwards, and despatch them properly. If you see Lord Dorville, Anne, tell him his voucher will be sent."

"The Duchess of N —— has applied to me," said Lady Plinlimmon: "what do you think of her?"

"That she 's the Queen of Dowdies," said Lady Hauton, "and, as such, I pronounce that she should not be permitted to disgrace our balls."

"And Lady Mary Derwent? for I see here is a note from her."

"Bless me, what a wonder! why, at this

rate, we shall have all the saints waiting to honour us. But give her a last chance, poor dear thing! If she would but hide those carroty locks of hers:—however, as we are not to have her rectangular mother, one fright we may tolerate: see how good-natured I am!"

"And Killarney, is he on your list, Georgiana?" asked Lady Anne.

"Yes, here he is at full length—the Earl of Killarney; but pray, where am I to send to? the man gives no direction: I suppose he fancies all London must know his residence?"

"Oh, send it to Portman Square."

"And what says poor dear Dorville to the arrival of this most dangerous traveller?" whispered Lady Hauton. "Were I him, I should feel terribly alarmed. '*Ce n'est qu'un cousin*,' as the old French song says, and nothing more convenient."

The Baroness thought Lady Anne blushed, but her attention was taken off by Lady Hauton's carriage being just then announced.

"Could you set me home?" enquired Lady Anne, "for I sent my carriage back for mamma."

"What can I do?" exclaimed Lady Hauton in a pathetic tone; "really, it is a puzzling difficulty; I cannot break through our rules: you ought to know, Anne, that our Almack's *bon ton* proscribes three things:—to dine on roast mutton, to prefer madeira to sherry, and to go three in a chariot."

"And then what do you do to a man who takes twice of soup?" asked Colonel Leach.

"Oh, send him to rusticate at Calais with my old favourite Beau Brummel; but such men no longer exist."

"Well, my dear Anne," resumed the Countess, "I see they have brought me the coach, so I can take you any where."

"My Lord wanted the chariot, my lady," said one of the footmen, "and his lordship's carriage is still at the coach-maker's, so he took your ladyship's."

"Colonel Leach, hand in Madame de Wallestein."

But the Baroness was in deep conversation with a gentleman at the door. She turned round in a moment, and said, "Lady Hauton, allow me to present my brother, Colonel Montague, to your ladyship."

The Countess took a general survey, as she returned the bow, and was satisfied, for she whispered to Lady Anne:

"How could you let such a *preux chevalier* escape?"

The usual politenesses being gone through, Lionel turned to his sister. "But, Caroline, what news for Lady Birmingham? she was on your list. Is she accepted?"

"Yes, indeed she is," said Lady Hauton. "I assure you we had a hard fight, but your sister's zeal overcame all difficulties. Your friends are admitted."

"Well, this is delightful! I must be the first to tell them."

"Then take the vouchers with you, Lionel," said the Baroness; "there they are."

"Yes, that will make assurance doubly sure;" and he galloped off.

Lady Anne was much surprised.

"Ha, ha!" said Lady Hauton, "I begin to see clear at last; no wonder the Baroness was so anxious for these dear Birminghams. Why, Anne, you should have told me."

The carriage was just turning the corner of King-street, when Lord Mordaunt, on horseback, stopped them, and putting his head in at the window; "What news, my dear Lady Hauton? any thing fresh at the committee? Oh, Anne! are you there in the corner? Do tell me, have the Birminghams got their subscriptions?" and his lordship put up his glass to ogle Madame de Wallestein.

"Yes! they are on the Baroness's lists."

"Thank you, thank you, that's all I want; coachman, you may drive on."

In another moment, their progress was again arrested by Lord George Fitzallan.

"Only one question: what news from Almack's to Birmingham?"

"Success," said the Baroness, distinctly.

"*Io triumphante!*" replied Lord George, in ecstasy, clapping spurs to his horse.

"Well," said Lady Hauton, laughing, "I shall exclaim with Dominie Sampson,—'This is pro—di—gi—ous!' must we go on, or wait here for some more of Miss Birmingham's admirers?"

"What would my good aristocratic mamma say, were she here?" exclaimed Lady Anne.

"Say! my dear, what could she say, but that

> 'Gold rules the court, the camp, the grove,
> And married men, and men in love.'

Pooh! the last line is a botch."

CHAPTER IV.

HYDE PARK.

"Where all the town arrayed *en-masse*
Disputes each inch of withered grass."

"If gentlemen were to write for the stage," says a witty writer; "if nature were to be represented as she is; if society could be depicted with all its follies, and absurdities, as they glare upon us, what a treat would a play be!" The abundance of ridicule which ordinary life in the higher circles affords, the trickeries and manœuvrings of fashionable leaders, the little contrivances and bits of generalship, the heartless insincerity, the frivolous anxieties, the unalterable arrangements, the strongly marked character of the knave contrasted with the lan-

guid insipidity of the fool, the pretensions of upstart vanity, the toil of the *nouveau riche* to climb into notice and popularity, the ravenous husband-hunting mother, the calculating establishment-seeking daughter, the blue ladies on the one hand, the dandy lordlings on the other, with a sprinkling of the saints, sages, and the savages of society,—in the hands of a man who mingled with them, and had merely the tact of putting down what he saw, would form the materials of a rich and genuine comedy."

This is very true; and we would feign flatter ourselves that all this daily absurdity is equally well calculated to shine in the pages of a novel; but of this my readers must judge.

"Ah, my dear Lady Birmingham, no chance of success for you, I fear," said puffing Mrs. Bucannon, as she stopped her ladyship's carriage in Piccadilly. "I was so ill-used myself by that tyrannical committee, that I own I trembled for my niece, poor Jane Leslie."

"But you don't mean to say that *I* am refused

a subscription to Almack's?" said Lady Birmingham, boiling with indignation. "Now this must be caused by my not putting Atherford Abbey after my name: Lady Birmingham of Atherford Abbey sounds so much more distinguished. But how do you know it, Mrs. Bucannon? Is it certain?"

"No, no! only probable in the extreme, for Jane Leslie and I were both refused, and Miss Trecosey, of St. Michael's Mount, too; only I had two strings to my bow, so at last I succeeded."

"Well then, get into the carriage and tell me all about it; for the east wind blows so very strong just here where one faces it."

"Oh, thank you, then you will set me home, will you? for I have had so long a walk; first to Willis's-rooms, and from thence to Berkeley-square, and I have so many things to do besides, this rest is really a comfort," said Mrs. Bucannon, as she seated herself on one of Lady Birmingham's ample cushions.

"And what have you got to do now, that's so absolutely indispensable."

"Why, not much that's of any positive consequence; but here's my list, I never can think of any thing without my memorandums: let's see—

"First, to order some oranges at the fruiterer's; oh! that's done. To enquire at Ebers what he expects for an Opera box to-morrow, as I have some Scotch cousins coming to town for a day or two; and they will expect me to get a box cheap, I know: to ask, at the same time, for 'Fotheringay' and 'Carisbrook Castle,'—both are supposed to be by Scott. They say he is going through the History of England in a course of novels, like a vastly sensible man as he is, just hits off the taste of the day, which, to be sure, is all in all with those sort of fancy things. Then, to order the Quarterly, at Murray's. To Grafton-street, to enquire about Lady Margaret Mackintosh, at Lord Inverness's,—we none of us know where her tickets are to be left. To remember, too, that Mrs. Orlando Prettyman is

lying-in at Coulson's hotel: I must have my name set down, of course. But none of these things signify at all, Lady Birmingham, if you are bent elsewhere."

"No, indeed, I was only going home; and you can finish your calls afterwards, if you please, but I am really dying to hear all about Almack's."

"I can tell you little enough, for it seemed to be the order of the day to blackball everybody, right and left—all the new applicants as a matter of course."

"It will be too provoking, if we are refused; and just when I was going to send out cards for a ball, too."

"Hear how I managed.—I came home in great wrath from the committee, being literally turned out by Lady Hauton; but I set my wits to work, and I recollected that one of the Lady Hares was ill in a nervous fever, so I sent off half-a-dozen of those fine peaches you gave me, my dear Lady Birmingham, with my best com-

pliments, and, in return, came two vouchers for me and Jane."

"Then, I suppose, if no vouchers come, I am done for. Well, I shall be extremely angry ,and I will be revenged, by not asking one of the lady patronesses to my ball. It shall be the finest thing in London, just to vex them; I will let them see that I am not a person to be ill-used with impunity."

"Have a care only, that your anger does not get you into a scrape, because your ladyship may, perhaps, be the greatest loser in the end."

"But, my dear Mrs.Bucannon, how you have deceived me about this Lord George Fitzallan! He is never likely to become an eldest son; here is his brother, Lord Killarney, returned to England in perfect health, so there can be no chance of Lord George now doing for Barbara: so you see what a scrape I might have got into by encouraging him. Why we had better take up with Lord Mordaunt, I think."

"Certainly, you might fare worse; but why

not at once make a set at this famous Lord Killarney? he, at least, is a certain catch."

"Now, there it is again; at Almack's we should be sure to meet him, and an introduction might be managed, perhaps. But, here, we are at home: get out, Mrs. Bucannon, let me know my fate, and then the carriage shall set you home. Is Miss Birmingham at home, Moneypenny?"

"No, my lady; Miss Birmingham is gone to take a walk in Hyde Park with the Baroness de Wallestein and Miss Louisa Mildmay."

"Oh, then Madame de Wallestein has been here; did she leave no message for me?"

"I believe not, my lady," replied Moneypenny.

"Has any body else called since I went out?"

"These gentlemen, my lady, have left their cards," said the volatile groom of the chambers, holding up several visiting tickets; "and Colonel Montague was here a long time; he is only just gone."

"And you are sure that no message has come to me from Willis's-rooms, or Almack's?"

"Nothing of the kind, my lady."

"But go and ask the porter, and bid him enquire of all the footmen."

"Yes, my lady; and I was to let Miss Mildmay know when your ladyship came in."

"Oh, here is Miss Mildmay," said Lady Birmingham. "So, Barbara is gone to walk in Hyde Park, I find; I wonder you did not go too, such a fine day;—but what is that in your hand? some tiresome note, I dare say. I am almost worn out," said Lady Birmingham, with the pettishness of a fine lady.

"It is not what you suppose, my dear Lady Birmingham," said Julia with a good-natured smile, "it is something that I know will please you extremely: see," said she, unfolding the paper, and displaying its contents.

"Good heavens! how delightful!" said the quick-sighted Mrs. Bucannon, "the vouchers from Almack's, I declare."

"Well, this is charming!" said the exulting Lady Birmingham; "I have to thank you for these, Miss Mildmay, I am certain. I suppose Madame de Wallestein brought them."

"You are on her list; but it was to please another person that she had almost a quarrel with all the ladies patronesses to obtain their permission, and that person brought them here."

"Oh! I guess who it was: Lord Mordaunt."

"No, indeed."

"Lord George Fitzallan, then, of course."

"No! guess again."

"That talking Colonel Leach."

"No, none of these gentlemen had any thing to do with it, though they have all left their names: it is to Colonel Montague's interest alone that you owe your subscription. Madame de Wallestein said that her brother had urged her so much, that she should never have dared to face him with a refusal. He was waiting at the door of the committee-room with the utmost anxiety: she gave him the vouchers, and he

flew off to us with them immediately. The Baroness and Louisa called here soon after, to ask Barbara to walk with them, and I was sure you would not object. Lionel meant to escort them."

"Oh! you did quite right; well, I am really obliged, both to Colonel Montague and his sister. We must ask them to dinner again. I shall go down now, and tell Sir Benjamin about it. Very kind, indeed, of this Colonel Montague: certainly a very fine young man."

"Hem," said the quick-sighted Mrs. Bucannon, with a sort of inward chuckle. When Lady Birmingham returned to the drawing-room, she found the widow playing with a bunch of Opera tickets which had been left on the table.

"How does your ladyship fill your box tomorrow night? Roman thirteen, I see." "Oh, there 's my two young ladies, and myself; then I find Barbara very properly gave one to Colonel Montague in return for her voucher, and I promised one to Lord Mordaunt."

"That's five, and then there will be one left."

"Will you take it?" said Lady Birmingham, "for I am sure I have nobody to give it to." I meant it for Lord George Fitzallan; but, after this discovery,—this turning up of Lord Killarney."

"Then suppose I take pity on this spare ticket," said the sharp-fingered matron, nimbly depositing it in her reticule. "My cousins the Crawfords are all come to town; Jane has a brother on board the Captain's ship, a little Mid, and he is just coming up from Portsmouth to-morrow; so he can go on the barouche seat with the coachman very nicely. Thank you, dear Lady Birmingham, it will make the poor boy so happy. Jane and I are going to the opera to-night with old Mrs. Metcalf: she has Mrs. Sydenham's box; for the beauty, Miss Sydenham, is saving herself for Almack's. I shall have horses to my carriage to take me to dinner, so that we shall convey Mrs. Metcalf; but I am at a loss how to get home again. The

old lady always goes away before the ballet, in a chair; and I am to have horses for three hours only, that 's my bargain with the jobman; I pay so much per hour."

Lady Birmingham caught the hint. "I will set you and Miss Leslie home with pleasure to-morrow night."

"Well, that will be good of you; and little Archy can squeeze in very snugly by your good-natured coachman."

Moneypenny came in, to know if the carriage was to wait any longer.

"Oh! it must set Mrs. Bucannon home," said Lady Birmingham.

"I am quite ready," said the managing widow, crossing her tippet. "What a shame to have kept your beautiful horses waiting all this time in the cold! Mr. Moneypenny, will you be so good as let me leave this letter in your care to be franked, whenever it is quite convenient to good Sir Benjamin." Then turning to Lady Birmingham: "It is for my poor sister Innes

at Aberdeen; and, with her large family and small means, poor soul! she does grudge postage so. I am trying to get one of her eleven sons into the East India College at Hertford."

Lady Birmingham began to tremble lest her East India interest was next to be asked for; but that was reserved for another day. The widow only added—

"You will be so good as let my good friend Mr. Moneypenny see it goes safe to the post: to be sure, one can trust him, such a civil obliging person! he will be certain to think of my letter: I feel quite easy on that head."

"It will be put on the table with the other franks, in the library. Our butler, Silvertop, has the care of the letters; he will give them to Truefit, Sir Benjamin's valet, to see that his master does them before he goes down to the house."

"Oh! now! there 's the advantage of such a splendid establishment; so delightful for doing civilities. In my poor dear Admiral's time

I was in a very different situation: but now, not keeping horses, it is very difficult for me to manage. If it was not for Jane Leslie indeed, I often think Brighton, or Bath, or Cheltenham, or some of those dowager places, would suit me better than London; those flies are such a convenience: however, I must do as I can, a poor forlorn widow."

"Well! pretty tolerable doings for one morning," thought our dexterous manœuvrer, as she placed herself in Lady Birmingham's beautiful coach; "this has really been quite a trading voyage!" and she called out to one of the giant footmen who attended cane in hand; "Oh! pray, Mr. Thomas, don't trouble yourself to go with me—no occasion at all—I can ask any one passing by to knock at my door."

The courteous Thomas obeyed without scruple, nothing loth.

The party in Hyde Park, meanwhile, had enjoyed their walk extremely. Never had Barbara found Lionel so agreeable: his reserve was

beginning gradually to wear off; and, as she observed afterwards to her friend Julia, he was so sensible and well-informed, without the least affectation; he had such a pleasing, unassuming manner; there was so much taste in all he said and all he did; and we had better add, too, that he was so handsome; or, as all the ladies expressed it, there was, at times, an expression in his countenance which was really beautiful—so fraught with mind and feeling.

And the pensive Louisa, where was she? on the Baroness's other side. But she was pensive no longer: the sun had dispersed all clouds both in heaven and on earth; and Louisa's lovely face now wore its brightest aspect. She was attended by Lord George, and he was in the highest fling, all life and spirits.

Louisa's vanity was gratified; for her beauty excited the admiration of every idle lounger, and many a glass was put up by the smart dandies who bestrode

"Each hack Bucephalus of Rotten-row,"

to gaze upon her pretty face and striking figure: she coquetted away to admiration. Lord George's fierce mustachios and brilliant gold spurs could not be passed unnoticed either. Madame la Baronne de Wallestein flattered herself that her new *redingote blouze d'un vert Americain tendre*, her *chapeau à la Bolivar*, her *fichu à la Medicis*, her *parfait contentement*,* and her *schal Quiròga*, excited universal observation.

"There is nothing like a Frenchwoman's walk after all," said Colonel Leach to his friend, the agreeable Frank Trefusis, who that day sported the *ci-devant jeune homme* so as to outdo even M. de Boissec himself. "Now look at that little Baroness de Wallestein, what style she sports!—so light and airy.

"Oh," said Mr. Trefusis, kissing his hand *à la Français*, "*c'est à se mettre à genoux devant*: I vow she puts me in mind of that sweet little

* A sort of ribbon ornament introduced about that time, and formerly worn by Madame de Sevigné.

Anais we used to have at the French play; and so I told Mrs. Metcalf when I came from Brighton. Egad, Harry, let us join the ladies; you can present me: I want to know this famous Ambassadress, for she 's to be all the *ton*, I hear. Those are d—lish handsome girls, too, that are with her: who may they be?"

"Oh! the one on the right, with the grey pelisse trimmed with ermine, is Miss Birmingham, the great heiress, and a monstrous fine creature too, if she would only let herself out a little. I could be in love with her myself."

"Methinks you 've lost your opportunity, then, for that tall military-looking man seems to be making up to her. But that is a sweet little creature on the other side, in the lilac dress: I think I admire her most: what a lovely complexion, with those long flowing ringlets!"

"And nothing half so beautiful as all those natural curls, though that young Prince Alfred de Steinberg calls them '*des boucles au macaroni*." That *belle*, you must know, Frank, is the

pretty Miss Mildmay, Madame de Wallestein's *protegée*. She 's a perfect rosebud."

"Here they are," said Mr. Trefusis; "now let us join them.

We need not give the conversation which then took place, for there was nothing particularly interesting in it. One set of our lovers probably voted both these gentlemen much in the way. Yet Colonel Leach was so decidedly a first-rate fashionable person, that his attentions were generally thought a great distinction, even by ladies of the highest rank. He was always *au fait* in every thing that was going on in certain well-known circles: could detect an embryo intrigue, or a coming-on flirtation, quicker than any other male or female gossip; and he had a fund of entertaining anecdotes about those people whom every body knows. His friend, George Trefusis, had, however, one advantage over him: Leach only retailed good stories, but Trefusis invented them. He was acknow-

ledged to be the most amusing liar of the day; and, being always the hero of his own tale, did nobody any harm but himself. This well-known pair were, therefore, a most agreeable variety, and, as they usually visited together, they were often called Pylades and Orestes, though they were perhaps more generally known by the names of Romance and Real Life; and most hard they each laboured in their separate vocations. Mr. Trefusis always wanted to appear older than he really was: to be a wonder was his aim, and to attain this end, he thought all means fair.

Colonel Leach thought less of himself; he was given up to others: his wish was to be *un homme universel*, the favourite tea-table companion of the ladies, the fetcher and carrier of bays to the literary world, an humble votary of Apollo, himself a licensed dealer in epigrams and bon-mots; perhaps hawker would be the more appropriate term, as his wares were seldom from his own manufactory. He was the oracle

of a set of fashionable dowagers, by whom he was called "*le bien bon*;" and he, in his turn, designated them as "*tutti quanti*," from Madame de Sevigné's letters.

The Baroness and her party made quite a sensation this day in Hyde Park. So long a phalanx! four men to three women! in England what a wonder!!! All the lordly equestrians, who were "taking the dust," turned round to look at them. "It 's the new lady patroness," was echoed from mouth to mouth, and nothing more was needed to be said to excite a sensation. Here a debate about the House of Commons was interrupted, the very numbers of the division were forgotten by two ancient gentlemen, who stopped to put up their glasses to admire this fashionable group. Newmarket, Tattersal's, Walter Scott's last spring novel, the new Quarterly, the expected Edinburgh, Lord B——'s wonderful concert, Lord S——'s most extraordinary charity fête, the Duke of N——'s immense dinner,—the whole

"*Macedoine* of London talk," was suspended by the anxious desire to gaze upon our three Graces and their attendants.

The Baroness and Louisa enjoyed the thing exceedingly. What woman ever disliked distinction? Lionel and Barbara were quite unconscious that they attracted any observation: had they perceived it, how they would both have been annoyed! 'Twere needless to relate

"The numerous questions, that no answer wait:—
How vastly full!—Ar'nt you come vastly late?
Isn't it quite charming?—When did you come to town?
Ar'nt you quite tir'd?—Pray can we set you down?"

and all the pretty nothings that are discussed with such apparent importance by those who are, or would be, fashionable. Polite society in the nineteenth century may indeed be characterized as *le triomphe de la fatuité.*

CHAPTER V.

AN ECCENTRIC.

"——Je veux mourir si je sais son nom, mais enfin c'est un fort honnête homme, qui me parait avoir de l'esprit."

MADAME DE SEVIGNE.

THIS night Miss Bevil had one of what she called her diplomatic parties, to which she professed to admit none but intellectuals, in her little, dirty, one-windowed mansion, in the narrowest part of Bolton-row; but it was really very respectably attended. The Wallesteins met the Lady Beaulieus coming down the very narrow spiral staircase; they found Mrs. Bucannon and Miss Leslie at the top, on the landing-

place, waiting for their carriage. Soon after, the Norburys just showed themselves, for a moment, in their way home from one of those very late dinners, which are so inimical to people's stomachs during the London spring.

The Baroness sat *sur des epines* waiting for her carriage, which had, unfortunately, been sent a long way for the Baron, who had dined out. At length a little swarthy signor appeared, who croaked away upon a cracked guitar, in a very *languoroso* style, about his *amor* for his *idolo amato*, who was of course *crudel;* when, happily, the carriage was announced: they slipped out as quietly as they could, and in the hall they found the Birmingham party uncloaking. The great lady was eloquent in her thanks to Madame de Wallestein about Almack's. The young ladies lamented extremely that they should thus miss each other; but the Baron had a bad cold, he must not be kept waiting any longer. Miss Bevil was enchanted to see her new visitants, although late.

"This is Liberty-hall," said she, "as I tell everybody; *Ici chacun fait ce qu'il veut: n'est ce pas, Monsieur le Comte?*" turning to an old grey-headed gentleman.

"*Mademoiselle*," said he, bowing, and taking snuff, and shrugging his shoulders, all at the same time, "*Quant à moi, je trouve que partout on fait ce qu'on peut, et non pas ce qu'on veut.*"

Some of the company smiled: there was no denying the truth of the observation.

"Well," said Miss Bevil, "I repeat, this is Liberty-hall. People may be as dull, or as pleasant as they please, when they come here: '*Brille qui peut, s'endort qui veut.*'"

"What is all this about liberty?" said a very singular-looking young man, who at that moment entered from the boudoir, followed by an old gentleman. "Our game at chess is over at last, Miss Bevil, and I want to know what is all this tirade about liberty."

"Why, I call this little mansion of mine Liberty-hall," said Miss Bevil, who was one of

those witty people, who are never tired of repeating their own *bons mots.*

"Well," said the young man, "and I will answer you in the words of Voltaire, who, I take it, was a good judge of what was *agréable en fait de société:* he tells us—

> 'La Liberté, convive aimable,
> Met ses deux coudes sur la table.'"

And he suited his "action to his words," by deliberately putting his two elbows on a little table, which stood before the arm-chair on which he had seated himself, and staring at Miss Birmingham in the most impertinent manner.

"*Mon Dieu!*" now exclaimed the old gentleman; "*mais c'est Mademoiselle Birmingham et Mademoiselle Mildmay! Enchanté, on ne peut pas plus, Mesdames, de vous revoir.*"

"Monsieur L'Abbé Le Blanc, I declare!" said both the young ladies.

"*Chut!*" said the young man, putting his finger upon the Abbé's mouth, "*Ah oui, j'o-*

béis, mais bien à regret ; Mademoiselle Birmingham, voilà un de mes anciens élèves, qui brule de vous connaitre, un aimable étranger."

The young man bowed very low. Barbara made a slight inclination ; she was little pleased with the stranger's manner, though his appearance was certainly very striking. He seemed about thirty, his features were very handsome, though his whole countenance was disfigured by the immense size of his whiskers, which nearly covered his face, and met in a point at his chin ; this singularity was rendered still more marked by his wearing no neckcloth. His eyes were dark, but full of fire, and his eyebrows were extremely bushy. His fine, black hair was curled in rather an effeminate manner round his forehead, and gave a kind of Rembrandt effect to his pallid countenance ; and his mustachios, which were *à la Vendée*, set off a particularly handsome mouth. He had, in truth, a "half Werter, half Corsair expression of face ;" and it would have been difficult to

say which his appearance was the most calculated to excite, curiosity, or fear.

To the Abbé the young ladies were very cordial; he had taught French to them both, and they were very partial to him.

Lady Birmingham till now had found it immensely dull; but Mrs. Metcalf had bustled up to her, and the whole history of Almack's was to be told at full length.

"So," said Miss Bevil, "my *boudoir* beaux are brought into play at last; I reserved them *pour la bonne bouche;* and you too, young ladies, are in luck, let me tell you, to come in *pour le morceau choisi.*"

"Ah!' said the stranger to an old *Comte,* who sat in the corner, reading a pamphlet, 'my old friend, are you still there? Who would be a politician in these days?" continued he, in a tone which seemed to demand the attention of the company: "who, that had a spark of fire or soul left? What an absurd nation we are! We worship a set of chimeras

we have raised up ourselves—the very shadow of shades! And then, like madmen, we rail at those who see and would expose our delusions! What are your patriots? Men who ruin their fortunes and their constitutions in that bear-garden, the House of Commons! And for what? To get a seat in the house of incurables! or else to toil like galley-slaves, as cabinet ministers, till madness or assassination close the scene. And then this wonderful country!

"The land of science, and the nurse of arms!"

What is it but a place where even light and air are taxed? where the commonest gifts of Nature cannot be enjoyed *gratis!* Thank God! I have none of this *amor patriæ* about me!

"Give me the land where citrons scent the gale!"

"Yes," said the old Count; "and where your favourite poet allows that—

"All, save the spirit of man, is divine!"

"He lied then!" said the young man; "and he knew that he did. I will sell my sentiments to no man, Sir! I am the servile follower of none of your writers or poets! What are they? Craven slaves! crouching at the feet of some hireling reviewer, or else sold to party. The spirit of man soars higher in those sunny climes than in this cold, humid soil; there is a sublimity in the passions of those children of the south, which the commercial, calculating sons of this cloudy land cannot even comprehend.

"Then your proud aristocracy, of which so much has been said! and what, I pray you, is it worth? I know of no good in an old family, but that a man is farther removed from the scoundrel who first founded it! Yet there is something proud in the idea of purely noble descent; something that gratifies the vanity of us short-sighted mortals! But in this nation *boutiquiere*, there can be no such thing; and so much the better, for—

" What can ennoble fools, or knaves, or cowards?
Nothing: not all the blood of all the Howards!"

" Next come your aristocracy of *ton*, and the civil war, improperly so called; for it is generally a most uncourteous one, waged by youth, beauty, and elegance, against the obsolete, the ugly, and the dowdy. That grand tribunal at Almack's makes and unmakes fashionables, I understand. The six grand inquisitors decide upon the degree of *ton* of each of their followers, just as a committee of tailors would sit in judgment upon a cape or a collar!"

The orator here paused for a moment: then turning his large eyes toward Miss Birmingham, " Do I frighten you!" said he; " you look all gentleness. Shall I prove to you that I even feel the softer emotions, as well as those of indignation!" And he turned to the piano-forte, and sang with infinite taste and science a little wild minor air, with those sweet words:—

" Ti viddi, e mi piacesti;
Ti veggo, e più mi piace;

E vedendo ti spesso,
Io perderei la pace."

The two young ladies were both surprised and enchanted. "Who in the name of wonder is that strange man?" enquired Lady Birmingham of Mrs. Metcalf.

"One of Miss Bevil's lions, some queer original or other, that she has picked up out of whim; half-madman, half-wit, I dare say."

"Will he be a proper acquaintance for my daughter?" enquired her Ladyship with some anxiety.

"Why," answered the old lady, "genius and that sort of thing is so much the fashion now-a-days, that ten to one if this strange man isn't quite the ton; but unless one knew what he is, or means to be, one can't quite tell. He's very good-looking, and vastly musical too; I take it he's of the Satanic school."

"Satanic school! Good God! what a shocking place of education that must be."

"But it's all the fashion, you know."

"And so you love music?" said the strange unknown to Barbara; "one link between us then:"—and he half muttered, half sang,

'And if music be the soul of love——'

And then, in a very plaintive style, he accompanied those pretty words of Moore's:

'If in that heart, so good, so pure,
Compassion ever loves to dwell;
Pity the sorrows I endure,
The cause I cannot, dare not, tell.'

"Is that person a music-master?" enquired Lady Birmingham of Miss Bevil.

"Ha, ha, ha!" was the answer, "faith, now that is good. Do you hear?" said she, turning to the stranger, "Lady Birmingham wants to know if you're a music-master."

"She honours my poor performance too much," was the answer, with a low bow.

"Well," said M. l'Abbé Le Blanc, "*Cela peut s'expliquer après tout*:—not de music-master, but de master of de music, 'tis much de same ting."

"As much the same," replied the old gentleman in the corner with the spectacles, "as a horse chesnut and a chesnut horse."

"And with so much music in your soul, and so much feeling in your eyes," said the stranger, again addressing Miss Birmingham, "so young, so interesting, so apparently amiable, will you consent to be sacrificed to the British idol, Fashion? to be the victim of ton and affectation? Forbid it Heaven!"

"What can you mean?" exclaimed Barbara.

"To ask if you will voluntarily give up nature, truth, simplicity, to become the creature of the world, to be worshipped by folly, and followed by rank?"

"Never, never!" said the frightened girl with much warmth; "how can you suppose such a thing? and who can you be that dare to form such an opinion of me?"

"One whom you will know better hereafter. Mark me, young lady, I know you to be just entering into life: beware the tempters that will

assail you on every side; let not even the voice of friendship influence your better judgment; but let your own heart speak, and dare to choose for yourself."

"I don't like all this whispering," said Lady Birmingham; "I shall take my daughter away. Mr. ——, what's his name? (to Miss Bevil,) Sir, will you be so good as ask for my carriage?"

The stranger bowed, but without moving rang the bell.

"Lady Birmingham's carriage."

"It is not yet arrived, Sir," said Miss Bevil's factotum.

"Madam, your Ladyship's vehicle has not yet arrived; they will inform your menials when they come, unless you wish to have a jarvey called meanwhile."

"Did you ever hear such a vulgar creature?" said Lady Birmingham, in a sort of audible whisper, to Mrs. Metcalf; then turning to Miss Bevil, "Pray may I ask again who that person is?"

"Oh, we call him the unknown; my lion of to-night: is not he amusing?" said the fair spinster, with a loud laugh.

"You think me odd," said the strange man, again addressing Barbara; "it is what I wish you to do, for I hope to be remembered, and oddity is the only distinction worth assuming now-a-days. A dandy! that is a character long since worn threadbare, common even to vulgarity. A man of fashion! there is no longer any such thing; it went out with the French revolution, and if such a creature were now to appear, who would understand him? A man of genius! no, that requires a something, and I profess nothing. Besides, half the world don't know the difference between a genius and an eccentric, and who would be at the pains to teach them. I am, Miss Birmingham, the creature of circumstances, perhaps more knave than fool. I laugh at humbug, I despise fashion, I used to worship glory, but now—glory and I have shaken hands and parted."

The orator paused, then looked at Barbara.

"But what are you thinking of?——of me, perhaps."

"Indeed I was," said Miss Birmingham; "you have told us what you do not like, and what you are not; perhaps you will now tell us what you do like, and who you are?"

"I will soon tell you what I like—to admire a pretty woman who is without affectation, and who is not ashamed of showing that she has sense; and I can also admire generous friendship without servility." This was said with a bow to Julia. "Who I am, you will know hereafter. I have piqued the curiosity of both, I see, which was just what I wished. A few words more, and I have done." He drew his chair close to Barbara's, and said in a low voice: "I know you are surrounded by a host of admirers;—an Irish fortune hunter; an English spendthrift; a gallant, but impoverished son of Mars, press the closest."

"Sir!" said Barbara with indignation, and her colour rose to her very temples.

"Fever-heat at least," said the stranger, in the same under-tone; "I see I have gone too far; generous blood boils quickly; but you will accept a caution from a sincere but disinterested admirer." Then, turning to Miss Mildmay, he added, "Guard well your lovely charge; she will soon require your utmost caution."

The eccentric then bowed to each of the young ladies, and, advancing to the ottoman in the middle of the room, on which sat Miss Bevil, Lady Birmingham, and Mrs. Metcalf, he said in the same loud pedantic tone, in which he had first spoken, addressing the lady of the mansion:—"Miss Bevil, I have exhausted myself, and my wit is now nearly at an end; dim even as yonder lamp: yet I crave a word with you, in your *sanctum sanctorum*. —What! old greybeard and the Abbé are gone; sleepy souls! snoring soundly, I dare say, by this time."

"He must be a madman surely," said Lady Birmingham to Mrs. Metcalf.

"Or a great author, some unknown genius or other," returned the old lady, with a sagacious nod.

"I thought he had been a music-master to that horrid Satanic School," replied Lady Birmingham; "but really he does talk like a book exactly, and you and Miss Bevil call him the unknown; and he is so tall, that he may certainly be called the Great Unknown with perfect truth. What say you, should he turn out to be the author of Waverley himself."

"Well, upon my honour! that is a new light thrown upon the subject. I know that Miss Bevil is very deep in all Walter Scott's secrets, and now we shall have it all out, the whole mystery unfolded," said Mrs. Metcalf, with a laugh. "Of course, Miss Birmingham will be the heroine of his next novel: why not the Rose of Atherford, as well as the Lily of St.

Leonard's? The Maiden of the Abbey would be a pretty title, and something new."

"But I don't approve of being down in print," said the alarmed Lady Birmingham; "it's a sort of thing not at all in fashion now, so I shall take my daughter off before the Great Unknown returns. I own I take credit to myself for the discovery, but I am sure you knew the secret all the time, Mrs. Metcalf."

Mrs. Metcalf could only laugh, which made her ladyship feel the more convinced that she was right in her suspicion.

On enquiry the carriage proved to be at the door, and into it got Lady Birmingham and the two young ladies, and they were fairly off before the eccentric had made his re-appearance. But the impression he had created in the minds of all three did not easily wear off: "Who could he be?" and "what did he mean?" Barbara pronounced him to be a half madman; some disappointed man of fashion, who had quarrelled with the world. Julia could

not conceive who, or what he was, but she pronounced his character to be wholly an assumed one. Lady Birmingham felt convinced that it was the author of Waverley, who had introduced himself to Barbara in order to get invited to her ball. She was quite proud of her penetration at having made this discovery; and the thing was told over and over again the next day to all her morning-visitors; some of whom thought her ladyship, in consequence, a little *non compos*, and others, supposing that she was telling them something extraordinary about herself or her possessions, hardly listened, as their eyes were busied in looking round the splendidly furnished apartment. The whole thing was so improbable, that Miss Birmingham and her friend felt quiet ashamed at the way in which poor Lady Birmingham exposed herself; though it was hardly possible for them to avoid laughing, when Sir Benjamin always concluded the recital, by hoping that she would not introduce any mad author to his house;

they always wanted to beg something or other. The Great Unknown was very rich, to be sure, but perhaps he might want to shoot over the Atherford manor, or to fish in the abbey lake; he was known to be a famous sportsman, at least so he had heard.

"Perhaps we may meet him at the Opera to-night," said Lady Birmingham; "and then we may be able to find out who he is."

The young ladies thought it very possible, and thus all the party looked forward to the evening with much anxiety.

CHAPTER VI.

THE OPERA.

"——— The opera hour draws near.
Not see the opera! all the world is there."

It is really provoking in these days, how very few adventures ever happen to disturb the even course of the existence of heroes and heroines. Not like the perilous times of the last century: then a lady could not go to a ball, or a masquerade, without the hope of being run away with by some lover in disguise. Now all public places are as provokingly safe as your own mansion; and, since the annihilation of the narrow streets, it is hardly possible for the most turbulent of coachmen to find any impediment

in driving down to the opera-house. No elopements, no tender tragic scenes, now any longer serve to stimulate the politeness of the bolder sex: hence, where none are in danger, gallantry becomes useless, and thus, as the eloquent Burke most justly observes: "The days of chivalry are fled for ever."

"Box-keeper! Lady Birmingham's box?"

"Yes, sir! Roman thirteen."

"Is the divertissement over?"

"No, sir! Paul is just come on."

How was the Opera that night? We will give the account of it which appeared in the paper of the following day: and which struck most who read it as a very correct description of that famous place of public amusement.

"The music, though professedly new, we could swear we had often heard before; the scenery was abominable; the dresses slovenly; the attention to stage business woful. But all that was wanting was there; for there was good singing, excellent dancing, and above all, plenty

of conversation: and as long as men can get invitations, and girls get a little flirting by crowding this theatre—so long as they are satisfied that the performers have been favourites elsewhere, and are engaged here at high salaries, it matters very little what is done on the stage."

Before the ballet began, the house had filled in every corner, and, as Lady Birmingham had cards out for a ball, her box was crammed with men. The Baroness and Louisa were just opposite to them, surrounded by foreigners, and diplomats, and all the men of the supreme *bon ton* who courted foreign society. Madame de Wallestein seemed unusually animated, but Louisa was always looking through her opera-glass, or searching for some one in the pit. It was really a pity she had not been told that Lord George was gone out of town on business.

Lady Norbury and Lady Anne were in one of the large boxes quite up at the top; Julia thought she saw Lady Anne yawn, as if she found it very dull. Lord Mordaunt was at

Newmarket, and they seemed to have no men belonging to them but Lord Norbury, whose whole and undivided attention was bestowed upon the dancers, and a certain blue ribbon, who was entirely ingrossed with the Countess. Lady Anne seemed to be of Madame de Wallestein's opinion, *qu'après tout, il n'y a rien au monde de si triste qu'un cordon bleu.* At length both Julia and Barbara saw Lord Dorville enter the box, followed by a very tall dark young man: Lady Norbury and Lady Anne both shook hands with him; he placed himself behind the latter, and remained all the rest of the evening in conversation with her ladyship; once or twice he looked forward, and then Miss Birmingham exclaimed, "Look, Julia, there he is, and see how intimate he seems with the Norburys."

Colonel Montague now entered the box. "Lionel, you are just come in time," said Miss Mildmay: "there he is! now you must look well and find out who this extraordinary being is."

"What, the mysterious unknown! some adventurer, I dare say, or he would not have tried to frighten you all."

"But then," said Barbara, "he would not surely be so intimate with Lady Anne Norbury. See, now he is leaning forward."

"What, that picturesque-looking man, with those wild, black, straggling locks, and all that hair about his face; I must own he looks like an Italian bandit, in one of the celebrated Penelli's drawings."

"Then he really must be *ton*," said Lady Birmingham, "since Lady Norbury patronizes him. But, to be sure, this Great Unknown has made a vast noise in some of the fashionable circles: what is odd always takes, I believe," said her ladyship, turning to Lord Hare.

"Oh dear yes," lisped out his lordship; "and all women admire odd-looking, black men. Black beauty is quite the thing."

"But, why suppose him to be the Author of

Waverley?" asked Lionel. "I should never imagine him to be a lawless-looking, wild man, but rather like one of his own orderly, sedate Puritans, with straight locks combed over his forehead, and a strong thoughtful countenance, with deep lines of care and study."

This led to a discussion, which lasted some time.

"Who is that beautiful creature, leaning over the centre pit-box and talking to that man in the black coat," said Lord Hare, putting up his opera-glass. "She's something new, at least it's a face I never saw before; how very beautiful!"

"That is Lady Glenmore," said Colonel Montague: "she has been the object of universal attention to-night; her beauty has excited general admiration."

"What a sweet girl to be the wife of such an old fellow as Glenmore," said Lord Hare. "So this is her *début* in the world, for I take it she was hardly out of leading-strings when she mar-

ried. And who's that lucky fellow she's honouring with her smiles."

"Lord Hazlemere is the man talking to her from the pit."

"Well now, that's good, to be sure, the dutiful nephew making his *yeux doux* to his dear aunt. Lord, how every body is looking at her! all the ugly women putting up their glasses, and the men getting round the box to admire such a divine creature."

The Ladies R—— next attracted observation by their *outré* French head-dresses: they were in the first tier, nodding, and kissing their hands to half their acquaintance."

M. de Wallestein was observed in a certain ambassadress's box, in earnest conversation with *sua eccellenza.*

"The pretty Baroness will be jealous," said Lord Hare.

"She seems too busy for that," said Lionel, laughing.

"Oh, I see she has got that haughty Prince

de Steinberg talking to her; and Miss Mildmay is flirting with that conceited *charge*, the Count de Rosenval. How I should hate to be *un attaché!*"

The opera at last was over; the final *pirouettes* died a natural death, and Lady Birmingham began to marshal her forces;—but her arrangements did not succeed; for Lord Hare would offer his arm to her ladyship, when she wanted him to hand out her daughter. But Barbara; without any manœuvring, became Lionel's lawful prize; and Julia followed with a certain Mr. W——, who was usually denominated the opera-spectre.

Then came the pleasures of the crush-room, that most singular of all places of amusement, where a mob of good company assemble twice a week, in a thorough draft of air, to enjoy the pleasure of inhaling the odours of expiring lamps, amid the ceaseless din of "Lady Townley's carriage stops the way"—"Lord D——'s servants"—"The Duchess of N——'s carriage"—

"Lord P——'s coming down"—"The Duke of S—— must drive off;" and sounds such as these continually reiterated.

Young ladies by dozens were to be seen freezing, with shawls off one shoulder, trying to inveigle some man, by means of sweet words or sweeter looks, to hand them to their carriages; the unfortunate mammas behind them, looking worn-out in the service, ready to expire with the cold and the bustle, sinking on the sofa opposite to the fire-place, to await their turn with what patience they might.

In another corner stood a knot of fashionable gossips, male and female, whose eyes were all turned towards the fire-place, where two very distinguished flirtations were going on: one of the flirters was a married woman, who seemed to enjoy the attention she excited, by thus openly braving all decorum; while shrugs, winks, and innuendoes proclaimed the strong interest of the surrounding spectators.

A party of ten young ladies of very high

rank, close to the door of entrance, monopolized the attention of some vastly knowing-looking men, and, by their noisy laughs and various exclamations, succeeded in attracting some degree of public observation,—at least they had the pleasure of hearing their names proclaimed by each passer-by.

Say! ye frequenters of the Opera round-room, if these are not its chiefest pleasures?

Miss Birmingham and Miss Mildmay shook hands with Madame de Wallestein and Louisa, *en passant;* the Prince de Steinberg took charge of the first, while M. de Rosenval appeared supremely happy that *la belle* Louisa was consigned to his care; but though she smiled upon him at times, her eyes were always restless and wandering.

"Where was Lord George?"

No one knew, unless he were gone to Newmarket, and that was not thought likely.

"So the Patronesses have settled their feud, Lady Agnes," said a young guardsman, who

was attending the Ladies Beaulieus through the crowd, "and we are to have an Almack's to-morrow. Why, it has been quite a Montague and Capulet business."

"Capital, upon my word, Captain Macdonald," said Miss Bevil. "Why, you know this new patroness, this Baroness de Wallestein, was a Miss Montague."

"Faith, then, I have said a good thing without meaning it. Is not that her by the door?"

"Yes, in the red gown; a fashionable-looking personage, certainly: vastly well dressed!"

The dandy Macdonald went off to pay his compliments to the Baroness. Having once dined in company with her, he was anxious to claim the privilege of calling her carriage. He found her already engaged with an insect of the same species, whose soft nothings were in this strain:—

"You look quite killing to-night, Madame de Wallestein. I hope you will wear that tur-

ban at Almack's to-morrow ; it will do for us all, 'pon my honour."

"But if it has done so much execution to-night, it would be quite obsolete to wear it to-morrow, Mr. Temple."

"Well, that 's true, certainly it would be quite Stilton."

"Stilton ! what does that mean ?"

"Oh ! don't you know Lord B——'s expression, signifying a thing to be gone by, fit for nothing but to be laid on the shelf, just like old cheese ? We 've all adopted it ; you hear nothing now amongst men but 'Stilton ;' it 's quite the word of the year."

"Thank you for this addition to my vocabulary : I suppose it is like what we call *la vieille tapisserie* in France."

"Or the old hangings at St. James's Palace. Now, don't Mrs. Bucannon look just like old tapestry ? What a gown she has got on, to be sure ! Well, I must ask her to introduce me to

the great heiress, Miss Birmingham. I hear those people are going to give a ball, and they are so rich that the supper is expected to be a golden one."

There was a set of *very very* high ton, who paid their compliments to the Baroness in another style.

"So I hear you are the new Lady Patroness, Madame de Wallestein; pity you from my soul."

"How shall we ever thank you for the troublesome office you are going to fill?" said another.

"My best congrats on your appointment, Madame la Baronne; though I think my condolence would be more to the purpose, on your becoming the victim of the public," said a third.

At last, Mrs. Bucannon was heard to say, in a very querulous tone, "Do, Captain Macdonald, ask for Lord Beaulieu's carriage?"

"Oh, stop a moment!" said Lady Agnes; "for here's Lady Hauton and Lady Plinlimmon."

The two saucy leaders of the *ton* now appeared: the first, all grace, was winning her way through a group of admiring beaux—

> Upon her breast a sparkling cross she wore,
> Which Jews might bless, and infidels adore."

The second, tall and stately as the rock from whence she took her title, might have been supposed to be a queen, occupied in keeping her courtiers at a distance.

Miss Bevil, with all her efforts, could not even obtain a most distant smile of recognition. Lady Plinlimmon looked above her—and Lady Hauton was *preoccupée*.

"Lady Norbury's carriage stops the way."

The Countess and Lady Anne, with Lord Dorville and the tall Unknown to attend them, now endeavoured to force a passage through the crowd around the door.

The mysterious stranger caught Miss Bir-

mingham's eye as he passed, and bowed to her, with a very particular expression of countenance. Lady Anne Norbury saw the bow, and looked full at Barbara with a degree of anxiety. Lady Norbury saw nothing; she was too busy endeavouring to pass Lady Birmingham without curtseying.

"Julia, did you see him?" whispered Barbara: "who can he be? it is plain he is quite intimate with Lady Norbury. I wish Colonel Montague had but seen him."

"Who was that black-looking man with Lady Norbury?" said Lady B——: "a sort of person who looks as if he might blow one's brains out, if one met him in the dark!"

"Every body is asking who he can be," said Captain Macdonald: "I say he's a perfect fright. Do you know who he is, Temple?"

"Lord! not I: some Jewish bravo, I should think; but, if he is worth knowing, we shall be sure to find him out at Almack's to-morrow."

"There 's the carriage, I declare," said Miss Bevil, taking the arm of the convenient Abbé Le Blanc, while Mr. Temple handed out Lady Madeline, and Captain Macdonald followed with Lady Agnes. And the old maid cast a triumphant glance at Mrs. Bucannon, who had no attendant but poor dear forlorn Miss Leslie, who was hanging in a disconsolate manner on her aunt's arm.

"Thank Heaven! I have reached you at last," said Mrs. Bucannon, bustling up to Lady Birmingham: "I was frightened to death lest you should be waiting for us; and, to be sure, it was so very kind of you to offer to set us home. Jane and I have been so amused! hav'nt we, Jane? Mrs. Metcalf went away when the ballet began. What a beautiful opera it was! And, by the by, did you see that box full of women with black hats and white feathers? such a collection! Sir George Bellenden's box, I believe it was: there were six of them. Lord Norbury declared there were eight mag-

pies, and that not any one knew the other. Jane, my dear, who 's that in the pink cap? and who 's that tall man bowing to Miss Mildmay?"

"Don't know, ma'am, indeed," said Jane, yawning.

"You saw the Norbury party, of course?" said the widow, turning to Miss Birmingham: "Quite in their glory, every body looking at them! Oh, and *apropos* of them. My dear Lady Birmingham, I must congratulate you. I hear you have seen him already, and made acquaintance too. Now what do you think of him? Is not he wonderful?"

"Oh, very much so indeed!" returned her ladyship, her head still full of the Great Unknown; "quite an extraordinary person!"

"And so handsome, too. I hear he sported the mad genius!"

This rather puzzled Lady Birmingham. "I always knew he was a genius," said she; "but, to be sure, he is a wild one."

"Oh! not in the least so, really; only put on. Mad when it 's convenient, that 's all; and a genius perhaps for a lord, but that 's easy enough."

"A lord! good heavens! Is he a lord?" said Lady Birmingham, much surprised.

At this moment Lionel re-appeared. "Lady Birmingham," said he, "it pours! We must not lose a moment, for there is sad confusion at the door, and I had great difficulty in getting your carriage up."

The bustle and agitation, the noise of the link-boys, the oaths of the footmen, the violence of the coachmen, the kicking of the horses, and the blazing of the flambeaux, effectually drove the Author of Waverley out of poor Lady Birmingham's head,—it was busied with other things. Had she ever read our friend Luttrell, she would have remembered that splendid description:—

> "How, in a rainy, blustering night,
> The London coach-maker's delight,

Comes on the startled ear from far
The hubbub of domestic war:
'Tis at the Opera, half the town
Before the ballet setting down,
In breathless haste, amidst the din
Of drunken coachmen *cutting in.*
Loud are the sounds of swearing, lashing,
Of tangled wheels together clashing,
Of glasses shivering, panels crashing,
As thus they try their civil forces
In whips, and carriages, and horses.
What tho' their mistresses should fret,
Be frighten'd, trampled on, or wet;
How, but by prancing in the mud,
Can pamper'd cattle show their blood?
Honour's at stake; and what is comfort,
Safety, or health, or any sum for't?
The bills, 'tis true, to those up-stairs,
Are somewhat heavy for repairs;
But courage, coachmen! such disasters
Are not your business, but your masters'."

The next day the following lines appeared in the Morning Post, said to be "written yesterday evening, in the Countess of N——'s opera-box, by that distinguished traveller, the Earl of K——:"

"How dizzy 'tis to cast one's eyes so low!
The beaux and belles that grace the midway tier

Shine scarce as bright as glow-worms. Half way down
Sits Barbara, gathering lovers. Enchanting maid!
Methinks she seems no bigger than her fan.
The dandy tribe, that buzz around her box,
Appear like flies; and Birmingham's great self,
Diminish'd to her glass—her glass, a toy,
Almost too small for sight. The murmuring sounds
That from th' unnumber'd idle triflers spring,
Cannot be heard so high. I'll look no more,
Lest my brain turn, and the deficient sight
Topple down headlong."

CHAPTER VII.

ALMACK'S BALL.

"Oh! that I dared, since hearts of iron
Melt at the strains of Moore and Byron,
Borrow their thoughts and language now
To paint our Almack's belles: for how,
Unless their Muse my fancy warms,
Describe such features and such forms?"

Advice to Julia.

"LORD DORVILLE!" said Lady Anne Norbury, putting her head quite out of the coach-window, in driving through the Stanhope-street gate into Hyde Park, on Wednesday, about six o'clock. "Lord Dorville, I say! Mamma wants to know if you dine in Portman Square to-day?"

"Upon my honour, Lady Anne, I hardly know; but I think not. I have a kind of idea that I settled to dine at the Travellers'; there 's a grand dinner there to-day; and Leach made me promise to go to meet some big-wigs. I hope to goodness they 'll move the ventilator, it gave me cold the last time: it 's in the form of a rose, you know—'the ever-blowing rose,' as Leach calls it."

"Have you seen Lord Hazlemere to-day, my lord?"

"No, indeed! he 's been too busy about Lady Glenmore for any of his friends to see him: he has constituted himself her ladyship's factotum—a most dutiful nephew, upon my soul! He has been running all over the town to get her the last new novel—that book every body's so full of,—hang it! I never can remember the name of those sort of things."

"Did Lord Hazlemere get Lady Glenmore a subscription for this set at Almack's?"

"Oh! I dare say he did; I saw him coming

out of King-street to-day, just before Lady Hauton and Madame de Wallestein turned into St. James's-street. Monstrous hard life, certainly, those Ladies Patronesses lead! just like office-clerks, and as badly paid too, it seems; for I understand there are no pensions."

"Who was that man you nodded to," asked Lady Anne, "just now,—a minute ago?"

"What! don't you know your old favourite Colonel Montague, whom you all made such a fuss about at Norbury: I think you must be growing deucedly short-sighted, Lady Anne."

"Dear! I have not seen him for a whole week, and one cannot surely be expected to remember all the men one has ever known, in such a place as London. But what does that same Colonel Montague do with himself here in town, Lord Dorville?"

"I'll be shot if I know," replied his lordship. "He sits in a corner looking at Miss Birmingham, I suppose; but of course we shall see what his motions are to-night. That is one

good in Almack's: it brings all the people together, and then one sees what's going on, who's in love, and who 's out of love, and all that sort of thing."

"You won't be late, my lord, to-night, I hope," said Lady Anne, in her softest tone. "Shall we call for you as we go by?"

"Yes, do; I shall be at the Travellers'; but what time will it be, do you think?"

"Oh! we must not be late, for there 's nothing going on in the House to-night. Mr. Peel's motion is put off, and, as there will be no House, the doors of Almack's will be closed at eleven."

"D—llish hard, to be so particular; when *one* dines so late, *one* has all *one's* dinner in *one's* mouth; quite horrid!"

"Mamma bids me say she will call for you at ten minutes after eleven; will that do?" said Lady Anne.

"Oh, that will be exactly right," said his lordship, as he gently touched his little Arabian, which, after giving a flourish with its showy tail,

and shaking its pretty head, set off at a brisk trot, so as to display most superior action, and excite the admiration of all the passers-by.

"How well he sits a horse!" thought Lady Anne, as she followed him with her eye all up the Park.

"Pray, my dear," said Lady Norbury, in her most pettish tone, "pull the check-string, and let us go home. I am tired to death of the sun and the dust; and then I am so sick of that odious *vis-à-vis*, with that glaring red livery, and the green woman inside."

Home Lady Anne returned, in rather a melancholy humour; but the sight of her beautiful new ball-dress changed her thoughts, and restored her to some degree of complacency.

The tedious hours devoted to dinner and the refreshment of the evening-nap were at length over; ten of the clock had struck, and at many an up-stairs window in the fashionable streets and squares were seen lights, which marked where perchance some youthful maiden was

trying her own and her abigail's patience, in pursuit of beauty. Half-past ten!! and carriages were to be seen in waiting at doors innumerable;—a little before eleven, and the streets leading to Willis's Rooms were all in commotion; coachmen whipping-in from all directions; great was the hubbub,—it was almost like the noise of distant war. How was the *éclat* of many a Parisian dress this night eclipsed by the fair complexion of the lovely wearer! Flowers of every hue shone forth in motley groups, and well-imagined wreaths, setting off to the best advantage the pretty little feet which peeped below, bright as the whitest satin could make them; or else lending their aid to illustrate braids, or give fresh charms to clustering curls.

"Hail! fairest of creation, last and best!"

And where, I pray you, can a better specimen of the sex be seen than at Almack's? I will venture boldly to pronounce 'Nowhere;' and to defy Lord Byron, and all his sect of southern

worshippers, to produce, in any country, in any longitude or latitude they may choose to mention, a set of finer creatures than "our Almack's belles."

> "Eyes which, no matter what their hue,
> Are sure to beat you black and blue;
> Or shapes, as if by sculpture moulded,
> In shining drapery unfolded."

After such an opening, how shall the historian of Almack's be able to descend to common prose—how, in ordinary language, venture to describe these sons and daughters of Terpsichore, the flower of Britannia's children? Yet it must be attempted.

"Heavens! mamma!" exclaimed Miss Charlotte Augusta Carlton, "would you believe it? we are really the very first: not a soul in the room!"

"So much the better," replied Lady Margaret; "I am quite of the Duke of Clanalpin's opinion, that, after all, there is nothing like a comfortable seat on one of the sofas; and you

and Apollonia can walk about with Adolphus Frederick, while I rest myself," and her ladyship yawned behind her fan.

"But not there, mamma! not on that sofa! that is the ladies patronesses' seat, sacred property!" said Apollonia.

"Well!" said Mr. Carlton; "I hope to goodness you'll believe what I tell you another time, and not come so confounded early; it's monstrous disagreeable to see nothing but empty benches before one."

"Hush! hush!" said Lady Margaret; "there's somebody coming in now, and there were plenty of carriages close behind us: tell me, Adolphus, who are these?"

"Oh! only that tiresome Mrs. Bucannon, and her niece, the long, forlorn Miss Leslie: she shan't take me in to dance though to-night, as she did last week, I can promise her.

"Oh! but you must not quarrel with Mrs. Bucannon; for she's such a useful person about

opera tickets, and ball invitations, and all those sort of wants you know, that it would be literally quarrelling with one's own comfort."

"Yes! Macdonald says he depends upon her for his nightly bread; but hang her, she is always plaguing me to get her off tickets for subscription concerts, for some of those signors who sing gratis at her house. I'm sure I owe her nothing, for one."

"See, see, brother!" said Miss Carlton: "here are the beautiful Lady Beaulieus, Lady Agnes and Lady Madeline."

"Lady Olivia, I suppose, stays at home with my lord," observed Lady Margaret; "and so Miss Bevil is their constant chaperon now: upon my word, vastly well managed. I wonder what my brother the Duke will say to that arrangement. Apollonia, who is that girl on the other side of Miss Bevil, in white?"

"That handsome girl, do you mean, mamma?"

"Rather showy than handsome; what Clanalpin would call a glorious galley of a woman!"

"That is Miss Trecosey," said the son; "the great Cornish beauty, and a d—lish fine creature too."

"And look! here are Mrs. and Miss Sydenham: both dressed alike, I declare!" said Miss Charlotte Augusta.

Lady Margaret immediately put up her glass.

"And nothing like them, after all; there 'll not be two handsomer women in the room," said Mr. Carlton, who was consoled by the appearance of so much beauty and fashion, and forgot it was so dreadfully early.

The plot now began to thicken, and grandees and fair *distinguées* came pouring in apace, followed by dandies of every degree. The majestic Lady Plinlimmon was the first of the ladies patronesses who made her *entrée*. She was attended by a train of men, her usual

body-guard, as she took her seat on THE sofa, with the utmost dignity of manner.

" Certainly," observed Colonel Leach to his friend Trefusis, " nothing in nature can be finer than the air with which our Cambrian princess stalks up a room. Boadicea herself could not look more haughty."

The round, fat, jolly, laughter-loving Duchess of Stavordale, with her scarlet turban as usual, which had gained her the niekname of the *bonnet rouge*, came next. She seemed always canvassing for popularity; and as far as shakes of the hand, " nods, becks, and wreathed smiles," were available, she was eminently successful in her endeavours.

But for celebrity, and that kind of popularity which is conferred by general admiration, none could compete with Lady Hauton: she bore away the bell; and was, by general opinion, proclaimed the leader of fashion, and the Queen of Almack's. While her colleagues were debating, she decided: her s was the master-

spirit that ruled the whole machine: her's the eloquent tongue, that could both persuade and command: and she was never idle; her restless eye pried into every thing, she set the world to rights, her influence was resistless, her determination uncontrollable.

Then appeared the smart and flippant Lady Rochefort, with a knot of admirers; to each of whom she appeared to have something *caustique* or *spirituelle* to say, for every *petit mot* produced a burst of laughter; and whenever she held her fan before her face, she was sure to be more than commonly ill-natured. She was plump and fair, and very pretty; mischief was her passion; and an incessant love of ridicule rendered her ladyship, in general opinion, a very formidable character.

Great, bony Lady Bellamont, who possessed height without dignity, and affectation without grace, now made her *entrée*, followed by two of the gawky, white-faced Lady Hares. They were all staring, first on one side, then on the

other, yet seeing nothing; bowing to people they did not know, and stumbling over their dearest friends.

"Awkward enough, in all conscience!" said Frank Trefusis; "but still Lady Bellamont looks like a forlorn woman of fashion."

"No, no," replied his friend, Colonel Leach; "a forlorn woman without fashion, if you please. But who are these coming next, I wonder?—first-rates I take it?"

Every head was turned towards the door, a general movement of curiosity seemed to take place, much whispering, all the near-sighted glasses hoisted at once.

"What is the matter? Who can it be?'

A subdued murmur of admiration now proclaimed the arrival of the new lady patroness —the Austrian ambassadress.

Conscious of her powers, the little Baroness entered with all the ease of one long practised to public effect. Every thing that the toilette

could do, had been tried, and not in vain; for the extreme of art appeared so like nature as to deceive not one, but all.

She was alike free from the stiffness of English reserve and the *hauteur* of English ton. Perhaps the characteristic of her manner was her perfect self-possession: she could be rude or courteous, distant or intimate, as occasion required; for the world was her theatre, and she was an accomplished actress upon its stage. The turn of Madame de Wallestein's head had been pronounced, by the old Marquis de Cendrillon, to be very like that of poor Marie Antoinette's: like her too, she could boast of a foot and ankle which defied criticism, and which she also had no objection to exhibit for the admiration of the public.

The six ladies patronesses were thus characterized by Colonel Leach :—

" The Duchess of Stavordale,	Good humoured vulgarity.
" Lady Plinlimmon,	Pride and prejudice.

" Lady Hauton,	Power and patronage, or *Veni, vidi, vici.*
" Lady Bellamont,	Dry, dull, and disagreeable.
" Lady Rochefort,	Captious and *caustique.*
" Madame de Wallestein,	Graceful art, or fashion *à la Française.*"

A long train of foreigners entered immediately after the Baroness. All who in any way appertained to the embassy, were of course in her suite; and many French and Italian *merveilleux* chose to consider themselves as her *attachés.* What fragrant perfumes issued from these ball-room heroes, as they fluttered their sweetly-scented handkerchiefs to assist the grace of their first *entrée!* Striking indeed is the difference between a true John Bull and a Continentalist, in a ball-room. The first generally looks as if he could not help himself: he has adjourned to Almack's from the House of Lords, the House of Commons, or the Inns of Court; and business, with recollection sad, still pursues him

at every step. Such a man must, of course, require the strongest excitation to rouse him to action: for, otherwise, Plèasure in every form may dance around him, but "Ah!" as the old song tells us,

"She'll never touch his heart."

What excitation then, will move his apathy? Why, that of vanity alone:—a pretty woman must make love to him. And this is the best explanation that can be given why, in England, the women always make the first advances to the men: and if they did not, there would, I believe, be no love at all in the fashionable world.

But mark the Continentalist! how is he armed for conquest when he enters the ball-room?

"Ambition's kindling flames his soul invite
To be the constellation of the night;
Much must the hero exercise his skill,
In due array to range the plaits of frill,
To train the neckcloth's labyrinthian fold,
In line of battle the moustachios hold,
Prepare his eyes' artillery, hearts to storm,
And teeth's white ranks in open order form."

So accomplished a creature, so bewitching and bewitched, must of course consider himself quite irresistible. Yet have all these Continentalists, and particularly the sons of France, the art of annihilating themselves before the fair; their obsequiousness and humility are unbounded: hence their rapid execution among the female sex. To be herself admired by an all-conquering Adonis, is so much more pleasing to a gay young woman than the having only to admire him.

Such is the difference between a French and an English dandy: the first is an impertinent, affected coxcomb, who makes love to every woman as a matter of course,—it is his vocation. The second is a cold, contemptuous, conceited creature, intrenched in a double armour of selfishness, *blaséd* upon every thing.

But, to return to Almack's. The sprightly Louisa lost nothing by being put in competition with her accomplished friend. She was all

nature and life; her dress, which became her particularly, was the happy result of the most coquettish and studied simplicity.

Her graceful slender figure required nothing to improve it, and her luxuriant auburn hair, falling in natural ringlets over her face, adorned it more than any art could have done. There was a gaiety in her sparkling eyes, and a sweetness in her pretty smile, which could scarcely fail to captivate the most insensible.

Lady Birmingham's dress was certainly the most expensive in the room. Whoever might be proclaimed the queen of beauty, there could be no doubt that she was the queen of finery; gorgeous was, indeed, the only expression that could give any adequate idea of the general magnificence of her appearance.

Barbara was in simple white, perfectly plain, with the exception of some very handsome ornaments. She looked well, but her modest, downcast air seemed to shun general observa-

tion; yet, when sufficiently animated—when she ventured to raise her long, dark eyelashes, and to display the fine expression of her eloquent eyes, he must have been cold indeed, who was not struck with her countenance—with that silent speaking charm, so superior to all others. But when not conversing, she wanted the dash of fashion, or that non-descript possession, called *tournure;* yet these were well supplied by a smile of perfect good-nature, which bespoke a constant wish to oblige every body.

Miss Mildmay, with whom she entered arm-in-arm, looked, as usual, the perfect gentlewoman: well-dressed, without pretension; and easy, without affectation.

The Norbury party were certainly much beyond the time they had fixed;—probably Lady Anne had been long at her toilette; but her pains were well rewarded, for she never in her life looked better. Lord Dorville was in

attendance; his lordship seemed in high good humour, and Lady Anne appeared to tolerate his anxious attentions with some complacency.

"That will do, I think, in time," said Colonel Leach to Mr. Trefusis, as he eyed the party through his glass; "my Lady Anne is a decided dasher, born to lead; and she will lead that pink and white Viscount some of these days, if one may believe those proud glances she casts at him."

"Proud indeed!" replied Trefusis; "her stare is enough to knock any man down. But look! look! my dear Harry, who is that good-looking fellow stopping Lady Norbury? See, a very tall, black, extraordinary whiskered man, with such fine teeth. Now Lady Anne is shaking hands with him, and he is bowing to all the ladies patronesses. Who can he be? I should almost take him for a foreigner, only he seems to know every body."

"Oh! that is the famous Lord Killarney, the great traveller; the most noted eccentric

perhaps in Europe; he is nephew to Lady Norbury."

"Bless me!" said Mr. Trefusis; "so, then, that is the man every body was killing, only last week. Why, I declare I myself have buried him in the *Père la Chaise Cimetière*, and related every particular of his death—that fatal Grecian fever he had caught at Athens. Well! this is stealing a march upon us with a vengeance."

"Now, Julia, do you see the Norburys?" said Barbara.

"Where, where? Oh! now I do, close to the ladies patronesses."

"Yes, yes! and look at the gentleman who is speaking to Lady Norbury. There! now he is picking up Lady Hauton's fan."

"Good Heavens!" exclaimed Miss Birmingham; "it is the strange man who was at Miss Bevil's the other night."

"Yes, yes, that it is; now we shall find out who your friend is."

"Do not call him my friend, Julia, I entreat."

"Nay, then, your protector, your guardian spirit."

"Angels and ministers of grace defend me! sooner," said Barbara, laughing. "But do not tell mamma that you see him, or she will begin directly about the Author of Waverley to every body; and it is such a fancy she has got hold of!"

"How well Louisa looks!" said Julia; "and how she is flirting with Lord George! they are now coming towards us."

"Barbara," said Lady Birmingham, "are you engaged to Lord George Fitzallan for the first dance? I see he is coming this way."

"I am engaged, mamma," replied the young lady, looking down; "but not to Lord George."

"Oh! so much the better; I am going to get introduced to his elder brother, Lord Killarney. I would have you accept Lord Mordaunt, should he ask you to dance, as an old acquaintance and near neighbour in the coun-

try. Better keep on good terms: you understand, my dear?"

"Yes, mamma," said Barbara, softly.

"Well! you need not look so shy about it! Do lift up your eyes, child, and have a little spirit! Pray, whom may you be engaged to dance with?"

"Colonel Montague; he asked me yesterday for the first dance."

"Well! well! as he got us the subscription, you could not perhaps do otherwise. But I do not see him here, so there is no use in waiting; therefore, should Lord Mordaunt ask you, you need not refuse."

Lady Birmingham's attention was now taken off from her daughter by Lord George advancing towards them with Louisa on his arm.

"May I shake hands?" said his lordship with his usual gaiety. "Does Lady Birmingham bear no malice against an unfortunate younger brother, who behaved so impertinently in missing his dinner engagement at Birming-

ham House. But now that the secret is out, I must tell you that it was my brother Killarney's sudden arrival that prevented my waiting upon you."

"We were the losers," replied her ladyship, graciously smiling. "But do tell me, is Lord Killarney here? I am dying to be introduced to him!"

"Ah!" said Lord George, pretending to sigh; "I see that my sun is set for ever! I am no longer a probable heir-apparent. What should I do now without such a kind friend as Miss Louisa Mildmay, who does not cut me even as a younger brother?"

"Pray has your ladyship cards out for a ball?"

"Oh dear, yes! Did you not see it announced among the engagements in the Morning Post—Lady Birmingham's grand ball for the 1st of May?"

"Ah! I see, then, the report is true: and your ladyship is weeding your acquaintance! None

but eldest sons are now to be admitted, I suppose: too happy Killarney! Miss Birmingham, I ought to take a formal leave of you; as they say Lady Hauton does of any man of her set who is going to become a Benedict. But you should give me your hand to kiss. Upon my honour, I would receive it on my knees! though I know you will of course never condescend to dance with me again—a poor unfortunate younger brother, cut off from all hopes of preferment!"

Barbara was much amused. Lady Birmingham, after presenting Lord George with a card for her ball, turned her head to see who was observing them, and Lord George took the opportunity to whisper to the young lady:

"Cut all cadets but one; Lionel is coming, but he bade me tell you he might be late.—And so, Lady Birmingham, after all my endeavours, my wheels within wheels,—my interest with the ladies patronesses completely failed; nay, more, Mordaunt, great and grand as he is, and all-

powerful as he is supposed to be with a certain Viscountess, had no better success; and the gallant Colonel is thus to carry all before him. If he is so victorious with my Lady Hauton, what conquest will he next achieve?"

"What a charming waltz!" exclaimed Lord George; "it's from the Turco,—little Collinet doing justice to Rossini in his best style. Miss Louisa, shall we join the circle? there's Rosenval and Lady Agnes Beaulieu, and Captain Macdonald and Miss Trecosey, and a very good set now. Are you inclined?"

"Yes," said Louisa; "Barbara, you will waltz, will not you?"

"Oh, never, never!" said Miss Birmingham, shaking her head.

Louisa whispered to her, "Oh, you have no idea what a pleasure you lose; and my partner is such a delightful one, the very best waltzer in the whole room. Now, Lord George, I am ready; let us stand next to the Italian prince Benvenuto and Miss Sydenham."

Away they flew to join the enchanted circle. The gayest, lightest, prettiest couple in the set —to twirl

"Till they were in love, or giddy;"

or probably both.

"Well! I own I am surprised!" said Colonel Leach, addressing Mr. Sydenham; "I thought Lord George Fitzallan meant to have asked Miss Birmingham to dance. Did you observe how attentive he has been to her for this last half-hour?"

"Depend upon it, Fitzallan knows what he's about, though; I dare say the mamma would not let her. So strange, now, is not it, that the heiress of so many thousands should not be dancing,—and this her first ball, too!"

"Perhaps she's reserved for his brother, Lord Killarney; what a distinguished-looking fellow he is, wonderfully improved by foreign travel!"

"Why, Lord Mordaunt," said Mr. Syden-

ham; "what are you about, not to ask the heiress?"

"Is she not dancing?" said Lord Mordaunt, with much affected *nonchalance.*

"Why, use your eyes!" said Sydenham, sharply; "there's Fitzallan has been with her for this long time; and now he 's off too: see how *délaisséd* the poor thing looks; do take pity on her!"

Lord Mordaunt crossed the room to speak to Lady Birmingham. Just before he reached them, the following conversation passed between her ladyship and her daughter.

"Pray, Barbara, who was that gentleman you refused just now?"

"Colonel Miller, mamma."

"Oh! only Colonel Miller; and here's that little fat Captain T—— of the navy coming,—pray don't dance with him."

Lord Dorville now sauntered up to them, in his usual nothing-to-do-ish style, "Miss Birmingham," said he, "if you wish to dance, Sir

Alexander Erskine is very anxious to have the honour of being introduced to you."

"Thank you," said Barbara; "but I had rather not dance, and I do not know Sir Alexander Erskine."

"Well! I think you are quite right," replied his Lordship; "I never can conceive what is the amusement of turning round and round, like a parcel of spinning tops. I asked Lady Anne of course, because I knew it would be expected of me; but she has got another partner, I see." And with this important intelligence Lord Dorville lounged back again to the other end of the room, to join the Norbury party.

"Well, now! he might have done," said Lady Birmingham. "But stay, I believe you are right, for I see Lord Mordaunt is not dancing, and he seems coming this way, probably to ask you."

"But Colonel Montague, mamma, you forget that I am engaged to him."

"And what of that, if he does not come to

claim you, child? You do not suppose you are to keep yourself disengaged the whole evening for him,—do you?"

Barbara looked much hurt.

"Miss Mildmay," said Lord Mordaunt, "Mr. Townley, of the Third Guards, begs to know if you will waltz to-night."

"I am much obliged to him," said Julia; "but I never waltz."

"And is Miss Birmingham of the same school? Does she never waltz?"

"Never," said Barbara.

"And will you not relax in my favour? *Ce n'est que le premier pas qui coute;* take one turn!"

"Oh! I can't indeed; if I had waltzed abroad, as Louisa has, I should think nothing of it; but it seems to me such an exhibition."

"Such perfect nonsense!" said Lady Birmingham. "I wish you could succeed, my lord, in persuading her to stand up, and that you would give us your opinion upon the subject."

"My opinion, Madam! you do me too much honour. I own I think that Miss Birmingham's figure would never look to so much advantage as in the soul-inspiring waltz."

"So I have told her often and often," said Lady Birmingham; "and really, when one considers what I have spent on her dancing, it is too bad that she will not exhibit, like other young ladies. First she had Mélanie, at a guinea and a half a lesson; then Guillet, quite as good a master, but something cheaper; last year she had Anatole; and now I am thinking of Charles Vestris, to finish her."

"Miss Birmingham will certainly become an adept in the art at last, a finished *valceuse;* one of the rarest things in London:—what will not gold achieve! How can you be so cruel," said his lordship, turning to Barbara, "as to hide all your merits from an admiring world?"

"Oh! indeed, you must excuse me," said the young lady.

"Foolish girl!" said Lady Birmingham;—then

turning to Lord Mordaunt: "This is her first ball, my lord, so we must be indulgent to a little shyness. It will soon wear off, perhaps too soon," said her ladyship, affecting sentiment.

"Who would wish for any change in one so charming?" said his lordship, in the same style. "Though you will not dance with me, will not you take a turn to look at the waltzers?"

She could not refuse; and Lady Birmingham felt satisfied that, at least, her daughter was leaning on the arm of a lord. So she turned to Miss Leslie, who was standing near her, and secretly wondering whether any man would take pity on her during the evening: "Ah! Miss Leslie, so you're not dancing either. Well! I can't think what all the young ladies are about; there's my daughter refusing every one, Lord this, and Lord that! but the right man, I suppose, will come at last."

"I'm sure I wish he would," thought poor Miss Leslie; "for he's a long time in finding me out."

"So, that is your heiress, my dear Leach," said Lady Hauton; "really a fine girl; nothing vulgar or *outré;* not a bit of a lion; may safely be produced any where as an ornament. Not like her most ridiculous mamma."

"Trefusis and I have been debating whether you would accept her as a *cousine,* by the end of the season; what says your ladyship?"

"What, as a stop-gap for Mordaunt: so then the wind does sit in that quarter. Poor girl! if she will consent, I think he could never do better. But I thought that had been his belle—that tall girl, who is showing off her bad Italian to that stupid Neapolitan Benvenuto—that affected Miss Sydenham."

"He has been talked of for her some time, I believe. He is a good deal at their house, I know; but then the father has many ways of attracting him, besides *les beaux yeux de Madame mère.*"

"Oh! that pinchbeck countess, Mrs. Sydenham; she is quite my aversion. How you men

can admire her so much, it is passing my comprehension."

"How beautifully that Miss Mildmay waltzes!" said Mr. Trefusis, who now joined the *coterie*. "She and Lord George are the prettiest couple here."

"*Ah! qu'il est heureux avec une telle valeuse!*" said the sentimental Count de Rosenval, to the Baron de Wallestein, as they stood looking at the dancers.

"*Mais, mon cher Alphonse, la Baronne voudrait danser, et tu ne l'as pas prié.*"

"*Ah! M. le Baron, milles pardons de ma distraction; je suis aux ordres de Madame pour toute la soirée, si elle me permèt.*"

"*Ah! mon ami, c'est trop; il faut de la modération en tout. Mais, Caroline, la valse va finir, ne perds plus de temps à causer.*"

"*Dieu! quelle grâce!*" said the haughty Prince Alfred de Steinberg to M. Ffifer, one of the *attachés* to the embassy. "*Madame la Baronne a la parfaite tournure Française, vrai, vrai,*

mon ami, et elle valse comme une Allemande: elle est divine, cette petite femme!"

"Now, M. de Wallestein," said Lady Hauton, "you must join our circle in admiring the Baroness's style of dancing; she is so graceful, so elegant, so perfectly Parisian. It is quite extraordinary, that no Englishwoman, unless she has been brought up abroad, ever can acquire the art of treading a ball-room. She may be ever so handsome, but she never has an idea of style."

"Madame la Baronne has *l'air noble, le grand genre*," said Colonel Leach; wishing to edge himself into the conversation, so as to make acquaintance with the Baron; "the true woman of fashion. The rest look like *figurantes*, or spinning tops."

"Yes! some with their gowns off one shoulder," said Lady Hauton; "some with petticoats too long; others with their sashes untied; here a couple standing at arms length, as if they had

quarrelled; there, a man literally pulling a woman after him. Oh! it is shocking."

"Or like that couple before us, going all *à côté du temps*. Now do look at that unfortunate little red-faced man, who is endeavouring to bear the whole weight of that gigantic Lady Die Hare."

"The English certainly do not excel in dancing, as a nation," said the Baron, expressing himself slowly, but in very good English: "yet it is from no want of capability, but, simply, from their feeling it absurd to waste much time in acquiring so frivolous an accomplishment. In this country, happily, every man has duties to perform; it is not here as on the Continent, where society is all in all, and therefore where little talent leads to great things; *un succès de société ne dit rien dans ce pays-ci.*"

"*Et vous vous imaginez cela tout de bon,*" said Lady Hauton, who piqued herself on talking French like a native; "what a wonderfully

wise and stupid nation you must conceive us to be!" And she gave a smile of much meaning to Colonel Leach, who observed in an aside,

"M. le Baron is not *un homme à bonnes fortunes;* one may perceive."

"Now, upon my honour! Colonel Leach you are too bad," said the Countess, putting up her fan, and pretending to be shocked.

The waltz now concluded, and Lady Birmingham had walked, or, if I dare use the expression, waddled up to her daughter; her rich gold tissue gown making as much noise as four common silks. She was in a great *fuss*, because she found Barbara engaged in quiet conversation with her friend Julia. But quiet and Lady Birmingham were incompatible, so she began tormenting her as quickly as possible:

"Barbara, my dear, don't you see General Hamilton bowing to you? Sir George Hilgrave, too, is trying to catch your eye. I was shocked, just now, to see that you did not recol-

lect the Duchess of N——. Pray keep your glass up, and then you will recollect your acquaintance better."

Poor Barbara bore it all with perfect composure.

Then came introductions to all sorts of dear friends. "My dear Lady Drummond, allow me to present my daughter, Miss Birmingham, to your ladyship: this is her first Almack's, and a very charming ball too. Colonel Brown, my daughter Barbara. Miss Townsend, we have all been charmed with your waltzing; I must bespeak your indulgence for a perfect novice, only just coming out. Barbara, my love, Miss Townsend whom you have often heard me mention as a particular favourite of mine."

Poor Barbara was quite worn out with smiling and curtseying to all these dear friends. How often did she sigh, and wish she could but see Colonel Montague.

The quadrille had not yet began, when, in a moment, there was a kind of general movement towards one side of the room. All the world seemed to be in quest of somebody, or, at least, of something. Every head turned the same way; young ladies looking curious; old ones asking questions; young men laughing; old men nodding their heads.

"What can it be?" said Barbara.

"I see nothing," said Julia, "but one of the most lovely faces I ever beheld in my life—look on that sofa—wrapt up completely in an immense red shawl, leaning back, with her arm on the side of the sofa. Do not you see?—with that very affected, handsome young man, hanging over her? How very beautiful she is!"

"Oh! I see," said Barbara, "with that very black hair, and those large brilliant eyes. Who can she be? Mamma, do you know who that very pretty woman is? Every body seems looking at her."

"I have been admiring her diamonds," said Lady Birmingham; "I never saw such brilliants! The comb has a marquis's coronet too; I wonder who it is? And now she is turning her head to speak to somebody behind. Bless me! what an ugly, red-haired woman that is with her; she must have taken her for a foil."

The beauty, whoever she was, seemed for the moment the general attraction; observations might be heard on every side.

"A captivating gypsy," said one. "Quite the nut-brown maid," said another; "pity her name isn't Emma!" "Never could admire any thing so dark," said one of the white Lady Hares. "What beautiful teeth! did you ever see such a mouth?" said a young lady to her partner, with a wide smile, to show off her own perfect ivories. "Only I've a handsomer one near me, unfortunately;" said the impudent puppy of a partner.

"She is a perfect brunette beauty, to be

sure," said old Mr. Sydenham, admiring the lady through his glass. "I always said what an effect she would create in London. Such a foreign face! she might almost be a Spanish woman: she has quite the rich glow of a Titian's head."

"Oh! she's too short and too fat for my taste," said the clerical dandy to whom this was addressed, the Rev. Robert T———. "A handsome face, I grant you, only she looks like a Jewess. And then she's such a figure! all her hair in confusion, and so muffled up in that red blanket, not a bit of neck or shape to be seen. I like to see a woman dressed out for a ball, when she comes to one."

"Look about you then, for there are plenty dressed out to show all they've got, and all they've not got too, who'd much better be covered in my opinion. But there's not such another pair of eyes or eyebrows in the whole room as those before us. And as for her dress, ask

Leach what he thinks. I say, Leach, do you think that little woman would be improved by a French hair-dresser or milliner?"

"No," said Leach; "certainly not: they might mar her beauty, but they could never improve it. Egad, Sydenham, she reminds me of those lines of Ben Jonson's:—

> "Give me a look, give me a face,
> That makes simplicity a grace.
> Robes loosely flowing, hair as free;
> Such sweet neglect more taketh me,
> Than all th' adulteries of art,
> That strike mine eye, but not my heart."

"Bravo!" said T——; "Robes loosely flowing, if you please; but this beauty is so covered up to her very chin. I hate cachemeres, as I do all other French fashions."

"But the French ladies always study the expedient," replied Sydenham; "and after all, the much libelled cachemere is very convenient on some occasions; it hides a dirty gown, a shabby *fichu*, a round back, or in short any

improprieties of dress or shape. There are times when the finest figure had best be hid."

The criticisms on the other side were in another strain.

"Well! the old gentleman has shown his taste, I must confess," said an elderly-looking coxcomb, arranging his frill. "But this little beauty looks like a confounded flirt, methinks."

"What a fool he is to trust her out by herself! Such a child to be surrounded by a set of danglers, who will soon teach her what a mark she is!" said another of the same stamp.

"But she seems to have selected a cavalier already. I suppose that red-haired lady, who sits behind, comes as duenna? Who is the puppy hanging over her, who looks so enamoured? A handsome fellow he is."

"In her present situation, I vow I should not like that red-haired lady as an attendant: were she my wife, I should fear the consequences."

The object of their ill-natured observations now came forward to relieve the little beauty from the weight of her shawl, for she seemed to be much overcome by the great heat; the attendant gentleman fanned her, and held her salts, while she rubbed her face with Eau de Cologne. The splendid Indian shawl was removed; the lady breathed more freely.

"Well, that is the handsomest cachemere I ever saw in England!" said Lady Birmingham, peeping over Mrs. Bucannon at the group which excited such general curiosity.

Lady Hauton and Lady Rochefort now appeared, attended by several gentlemen: the crowd seemed disposed to make way for them.

"Does not your ladyship think there may be some danger of the accouchement taking place at Almack's?" said the everlasting gossip Leach.

"Fie! you naughty man!" replied the Countess.

"Let us put it about," said Trefusis. "A young Lord Grandison produced in Willis's rooms! Your ladyships would be obliged to be godmothers. He would be patronized from his birth, *né coiffé!*"

"What, are you here too, Lady Rochefort?" said Lord Mordaunt; "upon my honour I have been looking for you everywhere. Will you dance the first waltz with me?"

"Perhaps," returned her ladyship, with an air of pique—"when you have done with *la* Sydenham—I shall see. What do you think of the trio before us?"

"Think! why, that Hazlemere plays his part to admiration. Did you ever see a fellow act the lover so inimitably? He did pretty well at Norbury, but this beats every thing,—and in public too; oh, shame! shame!"

"*Je tremble pour mes diamans*," said Lady Rochefort, turning to where she supposed Lady Hauton stood; but her ladyship had pierced

through the crowd, and was engaged in conversation with the interesting party on the sofa.

"It is! it is indeed, Julia!" said Miss Birmingham, clapping her hands; "it is my dear Lady Mary Derwent. Oh, I am so delighted!"

"Softly! softly!" said Lady Birmingham; "you will have every body looking at you. What! that frightful red-haired woman! Then who is that little beauty, who seems to have set the world on fire?"

"I do not know," said Barbara. "My dear Lady Mary," exclaimed she, seizing her friend by both hands, "this is happiness I did not expect. How delighted I am to see you! I had no idea you had been in town. Now you will tell me all about my kind friends the Selwyns. How is my aunt?"

Lady Mary was equally happy to see Barbara, and had much to tell her about the amiable inhabitants of Derwent Parsonage. She immediately recognized Miss Mildmay,

but she never once desired to be presented to Lady Birmingham, which rather mortified her ladyship, notwithstanding the pleasure it gave her, that Mrs. Bucannon should remark upon the extraordinary intimacy of Miss Birmingham with the Duke of Derwent's daughter.

Lady Hauton, who was sitting near Lady Mary, was also much surprised at it, and looked at Barbara with more interest than she had done before.

Then Lady Mary begged to present Miss Birmingham and Miss Mildmay to her friend Lady Glenmore, who brought fresh roses to Barbara's cheeks, by exclaiming, in her lively manner: "Oh, I am so glad to be introduced to you, for I have heard a great deal about you at Norbury. There was a great admirer of your's there, Colonel Montague, and he used really to rave about you from morning till night. What a very handsome man he is! and my lord is so partial to him, I assure you."

And poor Barbara hardly knew what to do;

and the impertinent Lord Hazlemere gave her one of his most decided stares, and settled that she, too, was a monstrous fine girl, only she had not found it out yet! Another child of nature for me as a study, thought his lordship, but of the sentimental, not the lively cast. Well, sometimes I should prefer a Madonna to a Hebe, when the fit's on me.—Just then Collinet struck up one of his gayest quadrilles, and the crowd round Lady Glenmore suddenly dispersed. All was bustle and confusion in a moment; the gentlemen anxiously seeking for their partners, and tribes of unfortunate girls trying in vain to catch one *par hazard*. Now was the moment when many an aspirant for *ton* might be seen trying to better himself in public estimation, by cutting some pretty girl, of no particular fashion, to dangle after an ugly one possessed of that magic charm. Now were the *chaperons* seen parading about with eager eyes, pursuing every sprig of nobility: mothers avoiding their dearest friends, lest their interests should clash.

Now were all the passions to be seen depicted on the fairest faces: hope, and fear, and hate, and jealousy, and anger; and sudden joy was too much for this, while chill suspense and anxious expectation were visible on the tremulous countenance of the beauty *vis-à-vis*.

It was this evident "man hunting" which made M. de Wallestein observe that he thought *des mariages de convenance* were much better, more respectable, than this English mode of proceeding. "It is a complete trial of manœuvring," said he, "the triumph of art! the mothers all setting their wits to work, and the sharpest gets the better. There is no more love in the case than in our contracts, and it is much more disgusting; so contrary to nature too, which forbids the women making the advances." And he repeated the words of an old song which the Baroness had set to music:

> 'You 'll in your girls again be courted,
> And I 'll go wooing with my boys.'

"But it is only in the *haut ton* in London

that you see this system pursued," said an English country gentleman, the father of a large family, in justification.

"I am glad to hear you say so," replied the baron, "*mais en êtes vous bien sur*, because at Brighton———" "Oh, Brighton! but that is the same or worse than London."—"And then at Richmond, when I was staying with my friend Baron Glogan the other day, I was quite astonished by the arts two young ladies were practising to catch a certain gouty old bachelor of rank. Why will not mothers and their girls trust to nature? All these matrimonial intrigues are so incompatible with matronly dignity, so opposite to virgin modesty, so very different to what we foreigners have been taught to expect in a beautiful retiring Englishwoman, that I own I should almost prefer French decision, to this indelicate sort of over-reaching. It is as inexplicable to me, as that a Newmarket sharper should ever be considered an associate for gentlemen. A blot on the national charac-

ter, my dear Sir: a most marvellous inconsistency."

"But when our girls do marry," said the Englishman, "you will allow that they make excellent wives."

"The best in the world," said the Baron; "I have proved that, I think, by choosing an Englishwoman myself. But what I complain of is merely an error in judgment. They overdo the thing, they mistake their own interests in the course they pursue. The motive is laudable; it is a natural feeling: every mother wishes to marry her daughter well. Every lively girl wishes to be admired by the other sex. But good taste and good feeling are shown by the means selected to attain the end. *Celui qui veut trop faire, ne fait rien.* A matrimonial market where girls of fashion are hawked about for sale!! what a barbarous idea."

But to return from this digression.—The quadrilles were now forming rapidly. Mrs. Sydenham fanned herself with more than her

usual agitation, when she saw the graceful Laura leaning, like a broken reed, on Lord Mordaunt's arm.

"Oh, I assure you, not at all," said she to Miss Bevil; "they are quite like brother and sister—such an old intimacy!"

Miss Bevil was equally enchanted.

Lord Hare had taken Miss Trecosey; "literally pounced on her," in Miss Bevil's expression.

"Adelaide," said Mr. Sydenham, "has Lord Hazlemere asked Laura to waltz?"

"Yes, for the next."

"Oh, very well!" said Sydenham, re-adjusting his new wig.

"Now, Lord Hazlemere," said Lady Glenmore, "you must fulfil your promise to me, to dance with Lady Mary Derwent."

"My dear Lady Glenmore, I never dance," said Lady Mary.

"Oh! pooh, nonsense! it will do you good;

I am your chaperon, so you must follow my orders, as well as my dutiful nephew here."

Lord Hazlemere obeyed, with as good a grace as he could muster, though secretly much provoked; for he saw all the ladies patronesses looking and laughing.

"Don't you dance?" said Lady Glenmore to Barbara.

"I am engaged," said she; "but my partner is not arrived."

"Oh! fie, Colonel Montague!" said the mischievous lady. "Ha, ha! I see I am right, my dear Miss Birmingham; so come and sit by me, and tell me all about it, and take pity on my forlorn situation; for I feel so very tired, I, who used to be so fond of a ball, and could dance for ever. But all my merry days are gone for good now. Take my word for it, therefore, don't be in too great a hurry to marry; you are much happier as you are: don't mind what the men tell you."

Barbara laughed, and took the vacant seat by her ladyship. Lady Birmingham seized an opportunity to present a card for her intended ball; and then, satisfied at seeing her daughter in a post of honour, she walked off in quest of Miss Mildmay.

"So, the insensible Montague has not appeared yet, Miss Birmingham?" said Lord Mordaunt. "You do not surely mean to perform penance for him the whole evening? It would be paying him too great a compliment; you would turn the man's head infallibly."

"I assure you, Barbara, I mean you to dance now—with any proper sort of person who may be introduced to you," said her mother.

"Will your ladyship permit me to present a friend?" said Lord Mordaunt.

Lady Birmingham granted the request very graciously. She was pleased to see that his lordship's attentions were beginning to be noticed by several long-sighted dowagers and in-

quisitive spinsters, who had begun to whisper and join heads whenever they passed.

Lord Mordaunt walked away, and Barbara consulted her friend Julia what she should do.

"What can have become of Colonel Mongue?" said she: "very extraordinary! is not it? What answer must I give? advise me, dear Julia."

"Dance with whoever is brought up to you," said Julia. "Something very unforeseen must have occurred to prevent Lionel; and it will look too particular if you wait for him all the evening, as this is your first ball."

The dance at length concluded.

And soon after Lady Anne Norbury herself approached, leaning on the arm of a very tall and graceful figure. When he turned round, it proved to be the Great Unknown himself.

"An old friend of mine, Miss Birmingham, begs me to intercede in his favour: will you

dance with him? If it be any merit in your eyes, I must tell you that he is also a great friend of Mordaunt's."

"Oh!" said the stranger; "rest not my hopes on that plea. I doubt not Lord Mordaunt's attractions, or the effect they have on Miss Birmingham; but I wish to know if she is willing to grant me her hand, on the ground of what she already knows of me."

"Presumptuous man!" said Lady Anne.

"And who would mind presumption in such a cause?" said he, bowing with an air of mock gallantry to both the young ladies.

"Refuse him, Miss Birmingham, to punish him for this assurance," said Lady Anne, with a laugh.

"And dare *you* advise any thing so cruel, *you*, of all people in the world, Lady Anne? I thought you were more kindly disposed towards me. Your answer, madam," said the gentleman, with an air of the most profound re-

spect. "Am I to be honoured with your fair hand in the next quadrille?" He paused.

Poor Barbara was greatly perplexed. In her confusion she turned round to consult her faithful Julia; but she caught only Lord Mordaunt's cold, satirical eyes, fixed upon her.

"If I could only speak to mamma; if I did but know who this gentleman is?" said Miss Birmingham.

"Upon my honour!" said Lady Anne Norbury; "I will answer for his being a very proper person, and for Lady Birmingham's perfect approbation of him; and what is more, I will explain the whole to *your friend* Colonel Montague, should he arrive at last. Will this satisfy you? Can I do any thing more?"

"No, no, nothing, I thank you," said Barbara.

"Then we understand each other at last," said Lord Mordaunt, taking her unwilling hand; "and to you then, my dear friend," ad-

dressing the stranger, "I resign this prize. Need I say how reluctantly?" He made her a very low bow: Lady Anne took her brother's arm, and they left them standing together in the middle of the room, and every eye intent upon their motions.

"Shall we remain here," said the stranger; "or would you like to walk while the sets are forming?"

"Whichever you please," said Barbara, timidly.

"Well, then, take my arm, and let us see what is going on."

She was much surprised to see how many people the stranger knew; and she could not but observe that he seemed to be a person who excited universal curiosity. More than one Duchess put up her glass to look at him; and the "How are ye's?" and "How do's?" from men of rank and fashion, were incessant.

"But let us take our places," said he. "Now it is my duty to take care that you have a *vis-a-*

vis who dances well; and space enough to flourish in, and show off your steps. Then, a set in which most of the men are lords, will please mamma: you perhaps will be satisfied with commoners, provided they be handsome, and fine dancers. But stay, my dear Miss Birmingham! where are you running to? That quadrille will never do, it is full of your college dandies, the *nouveaux debarqués* from Oxford and Cambridge; and we should have to sacrifice ourselves in order to teach them the figures. But where can we be better than here, just opposite the ladies patronesses' sofa? if we do our steps well, and behave properly, who can say that it may not ensure us both a new subscription?"

Barbara smiled as she took her place just before Lady Plinlimmon; she heard the Duchess of Stavordale say to that lady, "There, that is he, with that very extraordinary head of black hair." She felt convinced they were talking of the Unknown. Lady Plinlimmon said something of

which she could only distinguish, "Fine countenance! extraordinary expression!" And in a moment after she heard Lady Bellamont's lisping accents, "Well! all I can say is that he has lost no time: thinks himself secure, I have no doubt."

After all the necessary evolutions, expressed by those most unmeaning terms, *Pantalon, Été, Poule, Trenise,* and *Pastorale,* had been gone through, the stranger turned to Barbara and said, "I suppose I ought now to lead you to your seat, and with my best bow express my thanks for the high honour you have done me, and then take my leave; but I wish to keep up my character for eccentricity, and, before I disclose my name and qualifications, I think, as the Author of Waverley, I ought to be permitted a few minutes rational conversation with you.—In the first place, then, do you believe me to be that long-sought-for personage?"

"Oh dear, no! I never supposed the report to be any thing but a mere joke."

"Yet, after all, you know, I may be a brother or cousin; or at least, a friend and admirer of this unknown genius: so at all events your criticisms on his works may be of use. Suppose me, then, the author?—which of my heroines pleases you most?"

Barbara replied with spirit, and began to discuss the various merits of the inimitable Scotch novels. We leave her thus employed, while we take a peep into the tea-room.

Often, ay, very often, have I amused myself with the scenes I have witnessed in that very same tea-room,—common-place as its general appearance may be considered; with a very vulgar sort of long table, where most ordinary-looking men and women supply you with still more ordinary tea, stale biscuits; and most unpalatable tartines of bread and butter, make up the rich repast: sufficiently proving, how little sensual are the *haut ton* female world. Yet what curious scenes has this same long table witnessed! How many lovely elbows

have reclined upon the seldom spotless cloth which covers it, while love has been accepted or refused! How has many a faithful sister or *confidante* stood before the poor mamma, so as to eclipse the view of a scene which might, by possibility, prove dangerous if prematurely discovered; and then nimbly plied her with scalding tea water, and poured into her secret ear the well invented tale of wonder, or of scandal strange.

> "Told all th' adventures of the night,
> And flown by turns from truth to fiction,
> From retrospection to prediction.
> This is the place for parting bow,
> The corner that for secret vow,
> For weighty shawl, and hooded cloak,
> Half-uttered tale, and whispered joke.
> This is the room,"

where all kinds of winds come in—where you hear the music without seeing the dancers—where old ladies look cross and cold, and young ones are apt to be peevish;—where

> "When Sol hath risen o'er the deep,
> And fathers, more than half asleep,
> Begin to shake the drowsy head,
> And hint it 's time to be in bed;
> Comes sad chagrin o'er faces fair.
> Soft hands are clasp'd in mimic prayer·

And then the warning watch is shown,
And answers in a sharper tone
Reply to looks of lamentation,
And argument and supplication ;
Bootless are all their 'lords' and 'las,'
Their 'pray papas,' and 'do papas ;'
'The carriage waits.'"

And so does our narration.—At the moment we are now describing, the party in this same tea-room consisted, among others, of Lord and Lady Norbury, Colonel Leach, Mrs and Miss Sydenham, and Lord Mordaunt, on one side of the table; on the other, sat Lord Dorville and Lady Anne. Lady Birmingham and Mrs. Bucannon were "apart, and from the rest retired," yet not far. They were all drinking tea with the utmost perseverance. Now it so happened, that Lady Anne asked Lord Dorville for sugar at the same instant as Lady Birmingham begged his lordship to hand her the cream, so that the poor man, who never could do two things at a time, sat the picture of the delicate embarrassment.

"Debating to which you should attend,"

said Lady Anne with an arch smile, touching his elbow with her beautiful hand, which, as well as her fair round arm, was exhibited for admiration, covered all over with rings, bracelets, and amulets.

Lord Dorville turned his head, and fixed his vacant eyes upon the lovely form beside him; attempted to look reproachful, and then at last, in a slow solemn voice, came out with—

"Pray, how is the tea to-night?"

"One of the numerous family of the has-beens; a melancholy thought, when we recollect that it's what we shall all come to." This was said in a plaintive tone, and followed by a sigh.

Poor Lord Dorville looked touched.

"Did you think me mad to-night?" asked the fair coquette.

"*I* think you mad?" with a particular emphasis on the personal pronoun, replied his lordship, and his eyes fixed upon the most beautiful of all arms, naked to the very shoulder.

Recollect, my fair readers, this ball was before the reign of *gigots*, or he would have had to peep through and through the patent nets.

"If you did not, many others did, I believe. Perhaps I was wrong; I know that I have exposed myself to the animadversions of all the foolish men and women of my acquaintance—those common souls! who, if you do any thing out of the beaten track, teaze you to death!"

"And are the men so cruel too?" enquired Lord Dorville tenderly.

"Oh! among the men there are a few more generous souls perhaps!—but, for the women! However, I care little enough for them.—*Il faut aller son train.*"

What was to be understood from this, but that Lady Anne, *irait son train?—Anglicé*, would follow her fate with my Lord Dorville. At least he understood it so, and so she meant him to do; though her actions that night would, perhaps, have admitted of another supposition. She had entered the ball-room on

Lord Dorville's arm, and engaged to dance with him; yet she had immediately commenced a violent flirtation with Lord Killarney, her cousin, which ended by her dancing with him, regardless of her engagement to Lord Dorville. Yet, when he saw Lady Anne dancing, his lordship entirely forgot that she had been engaged to him, and amused himself very well in wandering about, and talking to his different acquaintance, particularly to Julia Mildmay, till Lord Mordaunt came with a message from Lady Anne, to desire Lord Dorville would dance the next quadrille with her. This dance was now just over, and we have given her explanation.

"I was so afraid," continued her ladyship, "that you might have been angry; I assure you it embittered all my pleasure! I kept saying to myself, 'What will poor Lord Dorville think?'"

Poor Lord Dorville seized the lily hand, and would have pressed it to his lips in

return for the kind interest manifested for his feelings, but he was stopped with—

"Oh! you thoughtless creature! consider only what will be said about us."

"I don't care; and indeed, Lady Anne, you often act as if you didn't either."

"Oh! hush, hush! for Heaven's sake!"

"How very foolish it is of Anne to flirt so openly with Lord Dorville!" said the decorous Lady Norbury, behind her fan, to her lord. "So provoking, too, when she knows who may see her. You understand, I am sure; and after all I said to her this morning! I do not like to see young women of fashion sitting apart from their *chaperons;* I never knew any good come of it. Do, my dear lord, give the inconsiderate creature a hint."

"Certainly, my love, by-and-by," said Lord Norbury, backing his chair, so as almost to touch Mrs. Sydenham's.

At this moment the attention of the company was aroused by the entrance of Miss

Bevil, in a mighty fuss, fanning herself in a violent agitation, and uttering various exclamations of surprise.

"Oh! Miss Bevil," said Lady Birmingham, "I have been looking for you everywhere. I want you to tell me the name of that most extraordinary genius who was dancing with my Barbara."

"God knows," replied the lady. "If he's extraordinary, he's the fitter for this strange place; where, to be sure, every thing is odd, and wonderful, and prodigious."

"Oh! but he was still more singular at your house the other night."

"Oh! very likely," said *la* Bevil, impatiently; "But, really, I know nothing about him, nor about any thing else; my head is in such a whirl of amazement. I am, certainly, in a violent rage."

"What has happened? do tell us," said several voices.

"Oh! you will never any of you guess, that I

am sure,—and such an indignity, too! Really, those ladies patronesses are too bad. What do you think has happened to-night?—only just now, too."

"What! what! what! pray explain."

"Why, only think of Lord Glenmore, and the Speaker of the House of Commons, and his Serene Highness the Hereditary Prince of S——, being refused at the door, because it was half-past eleven. Poor dear Lord Glenmore coming to take her little ladyship away, and in her delicate situation too, it put her into such an agitation. Who can pretend to say what the consequence may be? I really tremble when I think of it. And the Speaker of the House of Commons too, unfortunate man! having a holiday once in his life, very naturally wanted to see his daughter dance for the first time in public. And the Hereditary Prince, so nearly related to the king too! How angry the royal family will be, to be sure."

"The patronesses were not very civil to you, either, were they, Mrs. Bucannon?" said Colonel Leach, maliciously.

"No, indeed, behaved infamously to my niece, poor Jane! most especially Lady Rochefort, odious woman!"

"What can she have done in particular?" said Lord Mordaunt, starting up from behind Mrs. Sydenham.

"Why, what do you think of their pretending to believe that her ticket was a forgery; and asking Willis about it close behind the poor girl, and making him bring the ticket up, and the voucher too, for them to examine? And when they saw that it was all properly signed, they went to ask Lady Bellamont what she meant by admitting her, contrary to the orders of the Committee; at least Lady Rochefort did; and Lady Bellamont had the meanness to deny ever having signed the voucher. I am sure I don't know what would have happened; but Lady Hauton, in her high way, said she could explain it, and

desired they would all be quiet. And when I reproached Lady Bellamont for telling such a story, she said it was to save both her credit and herself; that, if she had acknowledged giving me the ticket, they would have turned her out, as they had before done Lady Lochaber. So much for the honour of a patroness!"

At this moment, in rushed Miss Leslie, breathless with agitation. "Oh! my dear aunt! oh, Lady Birmingham! such a dreadful business! such high words! They say it must end in a duel; and Miss Birmingham has fainted in Colonel Montague's arms."

The agitated mother instantly rushed towards the door, attended by Lord Mordaunt.

"Pray bring a glass of water," said Captain Macdonald.

"Some Eau de Cologne," or "salts," or "vinegar," "aromatic vinegar," "for the love of heaven!" said various young men, entering in prodigious alarm.

The nature of the dispute could not be dis-

tinctly ascertained; though, from the language which was used, a duel was very generally apprehended.

The confusion having soon after a little subsided, it was at length discovered, that Colonel Montague, having entered the ball-room almost at the same moment when the dancing had ceased, recognized in Miss Birmingham's partner the profligate Earl of Killarney, to whom he addressed some language which led to a serious altercation.

Mrs. Bucannon told Lady Birmingham, that Colonel Montague had quarrelled with Lord Killarney, because he ingrossed so much of Miss Birmingham's attention. Miss Bevil maintained, that it was Lord Killarney who resisted Montague's claiming the heiress for his partner.

Mrs. Sydenham was more positive still, in asserting that Lord Mordaunt, who must know, said it was an old quarrel, revived at Almack's, about some foreign lady.

Every fresh speaker differed from the last: yet

all were convinced their's was the only right version. In one point, however, they did generally agree, which was, that, after flirting the whole, or at least nearly the whole evening with Lord Killarney, Miss Birmingham had afterwards fainted in Colonel Montague's arms. "Totally senseless, I assure you, upon my word; her head on his shoulder," said Miss Leslie; "and he so affected, it was quite touching, I declare."

Julia saw how pale and distressed her poor friend looked, and for that reason forebore to ask her any questions; nay more, she even persuaded Lady Birmingham to be equally discreet. Lord Mordaunt, with looks of the most respectful anxiety and curiosity, never left her ladyship. At length Colonel Montague was seen escorting Barbara to the carriage. As they went down stairs, the light of one of the lamps fell upon her pale and harassed countenance; while she cast a look—an anxious, supplicating look at him, which he could not misunderstand: she dared not trust herself to

speak; but that tearful eye had more charms for Lionel Montague, than he had ever found before in her brightest, happiest smile. He felt as if a secret link bound them together for ever. As he put her into the carriage, she turned her head round once again: he saw her lip quiver, but she tried in vain to articulate. Lionel felt more and more affected; he held out his hand to her, she clasped it, while he exclaimed, "God bless you! promise not to forget me." Before she had relinquished her hold, the light had flashed in her eyes, and she heard the footman's voice, "Will you make room for my lady, if you please, Sir?" and Barbara dropped his hand, when she caught the sound of Lord Mordaunt's harsh voice, laughing with her mother, and could see the expression of his cold unfeeling eye fixed upon Lionel, who still lingered at the door. In another moment, the carriage drove on, and she sank back, overpowered with a variety of emotions.

Madame de Wallestein and Louisa were gone

before this distressing affair took place: the former, under much anxiety to know what could have detained Colonel Montague from Almack's. Lord George, of course, attended them home, and he, too, felt uneasy at his friend's absence.

Julia knew nothing of Lionel's arrival, nor of the scene that had taken place; for when Barbara went to dance, she could not find Lady Birmingham, and had therefore gone into the tea-room, with Lady Mary Derwent, and Lady Glenmore. Lord Hazlemere was gone to enquire if there were any hopes of the carriage; he had been away a very long time, and her ladyship grew more and more uneasy every moment: she had been disappointed, too, that her lord had not fulfilled his promise of coming to see her away; though she knew nothing of his having been refused admittance at the door. There seemed to be some great disturbance among the servants. It was a wet night; two carriages had locked wheels,—the whipping of the poor horses,

and shouts of the drunken coachmen, could be distinctly heard in the passage-room; poor Lady Glenmore was dreadfully nervous, and Lady Mary and Julia did all they could to divert her attention. At length Lord Hazlemere re-appeared; with great difficulty he had got the carriage up, but they must not lose a moment; and he seized the little trembling Marchioness, and carefully wrapping the beautiful shawl about her, he handed her most carefully down stairs. Lady Mary Derwent followed alone, considerably alarmed at the responsibility she had taken upon herself, and anxiously hoping that she might get her charge home safely at last. After they were gone, Miss Mildmay returned to the ball-room, and advanced towards the crowd of dancers near the top, in hopes of finding Miss Birmingham among them. She then, for the first time, heard of what had happened; and, soon after, succeeded in joining Lady Birmingham.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DRAWING-ROOM.

"Hither the heroes and the nymphs resort,
To taste awhile the pleasures of a court."

POPE.

BARBARA awoke the next morning but little refreshed from her disturbed sleep: Lady Birmingham was early engaged in preparing for the drawing room, which was unfortunately to be held on the day after Almack's. Her ladyship was deep in plumes and court-dresses, when Mrs. Bucannon was announced: the conversation turned on the events of the preceding evening.

"But, my dear Mrs. Bucannon," said Lady Birmingham, "are you quite certain then, that the Great Unknown, as he calls himself, is really *the* Lord Killarney?

"As certain as that I sit here," replied the widow. "The son and heir of the Marquis of Allandale. What can make you call him the Great Unknown?

"I call him so, indeed! He called himself so to me! and that was what entirely misled me. The Scotch Novels, and that Great Unknown, run so much in one's head now always, and his odd conversation too made it quite natural to suppose he was an author. So, that is really Lord Killarney, the elder brother of Lord George Fitzallan!"

"One of the first catches in the kingdom, too; the man you were dying to know, Lady Birmingham. How cleverly, to be sure, your daughter has stolen a march upon you this time. Gets acquainted with him unknown to you; flirts a whole evening with him; then dances

with him; and lastly faints, because he has a sort of quarrel with another gentleman."

"But Barbara fainted in Colonel Montague's arms, you know; that 's the unfortunate part of it."

"Most fortunate; I should say."

"But, my dear Mrs. Bucannon, you don't take it right; my belief is, that Barbara fainted *for* this Colonel Montague."

"Well! I must say I do not see any thing to lead one to make that conclusion. She was dancing with Lord Killarney, after flirting violently with him, as hundreds can testify; this hot-headed Colonel frightened her with his violence, and made her nervous. Don't you see, my dearest friend? Very natural, too."

"Well! and what then? She has made herself very much talked about, which is always disadvantageous to a young woman of fashion."

"Disadvantageous to her! quite the contrary, I assure you. Her name and Lord Killarney's are coupled together by every body; is

not that just what you wish? She is supposed to have fainted, because she heard Colonel Montague challenge him. Why, even in walking here from my band-box in Mount Street, I met three men who were all full of it,—Captain Gregory of the Guards, Young Dawson, and Colonel Clutterbuck. Nay, I assure you some people go so far as to suppose that Lord Killarney proposed to Miss Birmingham last night."

"But how must I make her confess all this?"

"Confess! that would ruin all. No! no! take it all for granted. Ask no questions, but be very affectionate; then, encourage the Earl, and keep off the Colonel, and leave things to work their own way. If Montague's affair is named, seem to suppose him very much in the wrong; to have behaved very ill; talk of ingratitude, and sad return after so much kindness—don't commit yourself by any thing very decided, but imply a great deal, and look every thing that is required."

"Certainly, Lord Killarney would be a

match I should highly approve of. It would be delightful to have Barbara hereafter Marchioness of Allandale; to see her cut out that saucy Lady Anne. And for her to take place of that haughty Lady Norbury, would indeed be a satisfaction I would buy at any price."

"Yes, yes! and depend on it this will happen. But let us have a *corps de reserve*, for there is nothing, after all, like being doubly armed. Keep well, therefore, with Lord Mordaunt: you can have him any day, I presume, from appearances."

"Yes, indeed, I think so; that is my view of the case at least: and, do you know," said Lady Birmingham, somewhat thoughtfully, "at times I doubt whether good English acres, in our own country, are not to be preferred to Irish estates, that one knows nothing about? Then that would vex his dear mamma nearly as much, for I know she looks down upon us mightily."

"Oh! my dear Lady Birmingham, how de-

lighted I should be to receive a note from you announcing this charming match. And then we should see your beautiful daughter attracting more notice than that conceited Austrian ambassadress."

"How much she is the *ton*, to be sure. That is one thing, by the by, rather against us: for Colonel Montague being her brother, has become a person of some mark. He is certainly handsome!"

"Yes! so I am told people think; but I never admire that sort of fresh-coloured man. Your dark complexions for me: the kind of countenance, now, of Lord Killarney; I do admire his eyes particularly. But don't I hear a knock at the door?"

"Come in!" said Lady Birmingham. "Oh! it is only Trollope, to announce Delacour the hair-dresser, I dare say?"

"Yes, my lady; and Miss Birmingham hopes your ladyship will be so good as dress first: she will be ready by that time."

"I 'm coming directly, Trollope!"

"Well, then, good morning!" said the widow: "I shall come again, to hear the news, and to pronounce how you both look in your dresses."

Before Miss Birmingham began the great operation of the toilette, her delight may be conceived at the arrival of a little twisted note from Louisa Mildmay, containing merely these words:—

"My dearest Barbara,

"The Baroness bids me tell you L. M. is safe; you need have no alarm. She will explain ALL at the drawing-room.

"Excuse the greatest haste. Lord G. promises to leave this.

"Your affectionate

"LOUISA."

In process of time, the important M. Delacour had completed his labours, and the general

effect met with great admiration. Madame Carson had also done her utmost. My Lady Birmingham's train of gold tissue, her robe of the finest blonde, her immense plume of feathers, and her splendid tiara of diamonds, were each perfect of their kind: but the *tout ensemble* failed in its general effect; and yet it answered every end, for she was the glory of her maid—the boast of her milliner—the *chef-d'œuvre* of her hair-dresser—the wonder of all the newspapers, and the amusement of the *distingués* at the drawing-room. She was determined to prove her riches, and the immense expense of her dress certainly could not admit of a doubt. Barbara had with difficulty obtained leave to follow the bent of her own unassuming taste. The simple elegance of her appearance formed a happy contrast to her mother's gaudy attire. Her dress was white crape, ornamented with bouquets of lily of the valley mixed with rose-buds; the same in her hair; and, for the first time, she wore the

beautiful pearls which her father had given her on her birthday. The feverish agitation produced by the events of the last twelve hours had given her a most becoming colour. She looked particularly well, and was universally admired. The little Baronet's richly embroidered coat, gay as all the colours of the rainbow could make it, served but to set off his vulgar insignificance: he looked perfectly eclipsed by his stately wife, whose portly presence he seemed to look up to with infinite admiration and respect.

"What a capital foil that great, fat, impudent Lady Birmingham is to her sweet daughter!" said Lord Norbury to Colonel Leach, who was standing near him when the Birmingham party entered.

"Yes, indeed! and the very dress too; such a pleasing variety. Miss Birmingham is decidedly not a beauty, but she has several very good points, and is altogether what one would call a fine elegant creature. Has a dignity of

manner too, which suits exactly with the character of her face."

"Yes," said the Earl; "leave the women alone for that, they generally know what will suit them in point of dress and manner. I declare I don't see any body here that I admire more; and in my opinion, Leach, no place shows off real beauty more than the drawing-room."

"Exactly so, my lord! enables your true connoisseur," with a bow to his lordship, "to detect the real gem from the counterfeit. Nature's rouge alone charms here. Miss Birmingham, now, looked pale last night, at one time, indeed, white as marble; but what a lovely bloom she has this morning! and it comes and goes so prettily too when she speaks. No compliment did I ever think so flattering, when I was a young fellow, half a century ago that is," said the modest Colonel, looking down upon a pair of the very thinnest of thin lace stockings, with much complacency; "nothing

so agreeable as a pretty young woman colouring, if she did but just catch one's eye *en passant*."

"So you saw the girl faint at Almack's, did you?" said the Earl.

"To be sure I did! it was the thing of the night; nothing else was talked about. Her two cavaliers, it seems, frightened her by their violence. Some quarrel, they say, about an Italian lady; a friend, I suppose, to both."

"So Mordaunt told me this morning; some Neapolitan Circe, I fancy: *eh! vive la jeunesse, mon ami!*" said his lordship; who was a great latitudinarian in morals. "I was glad to hear, however, that the young lady fainted from fright, and not from love, as some people thought; but I took it for granted that my son must know, for, *entre nous*, he is vastly in the secrets of the family. Indeed, the mother has given me to understand—pretty broadly too—that she thinks Mordaunt a fine young man; and indeed I don't altogether blame her,"

added Lord Norbury, very complacently; "I do not well see that the girl could do better. Her charms might possibly tempt me," here his lordship took a pinch of snuff, "to forgive certai n wants of blood and pedigree:—but she is in herself such a jewel—"

"So well set, too!" said Colonel Leach sarcastically; "in purest gold."

"I have had such a morning!" continued Lord Norbury, not choosing to notice this last speech. "My ladies at home have been in great despair about Killarney's Irish hot headedness; they had heard that he was going to fight Colonel Montague, and somebody had said that he was a crack shot, a regular duellist. Now you know Killarney is Lady Norbury's nephew; Lord A andale, his father, is her half brother, by a different mother; and thus nearly connected, it has long been a favourite scheme of her ladyship's, as my daughter Anne is of a very proper age—not that myself I ever approve of first cousins marrying—yet—"

"My lord, I beg pardon for interrupting; but had not we better make our way towards his Majesty? there seems an opening now," said Colonel Leach. "Oh! my dear Lady Bellamont, I fear my sword has done some mischief."

"This comes now of leaving off hoops," said Lady Bellamont. "How unlike a drawing-room this looks! All the people crowding so together: driven on past the King, like a flock of sheep,—Keep moving,—go on. Really it is abominable. What say you, my dear Miss Brandon?"

"Say! oh! I am outrageous quite. I, who was maid of honour to good Queen Charlotte, for above twenty years, in the gone-by days of bags, swords, and good-breeding; you may conceive how I feel at this usurpation of round heads and dishabilles. 'Ma'am, please to put your train down,' said the man who let me in at the door. 'Sir,' said I, turning furiously upon my heel, 'I am not come here to be told by

you what I am to do, or by any body else. I have lived at court all my life, I beg to tell you,—I shall let my train down when I please.' I wish you could have seen how the fellow stared."

"I own I do mourn over the lost dignity of hoops," said Lady Bellamont.

"Yes," replied the witty Colonel Leach, "your ladyship has, I dare say, experienced the truth of what the poet tells us—

> "For from the hoop's bewitching round,
> Her very shoe had power to wound."

"Don't you enjoy having no hoops, my dear Miss S——?" said Lady D——, on the other side.

"Oh! I never wore a hoop," lisped out Miss S——. "I was not come out in those hoop days."

"Oh! you can form no idea what torments they were; it was like carrying a house on one's back: so frightful, and so ridiculous too; and

the getting into one's carriage was such an effort."

"'Pon honour," said Captain M——, "it must have disguised the women sadly. So out of nature too. Thank heaven! I did not flourish in such absurd times, I should certainly have died of it."

"Heavens! what a crowd!" said Lady H——. "Do you know, I really had that little man's queue in my mouth."

"That comes of being such a may-pole," said Lady D——, aside, who was but about an inch shorter.

"Pardon me," said Mr. S——, putting up his swan-like neck; "but surely height is a wonderful advantage in such a crowd as this."

"Oh! my feathers, my feathers!" screamed out Lady D——, whose head-dress had unfortunately got entangled in a gigantic aid-de-camp's splendid shoulder-knot. They were with some difficulty released.

"Rather too close a union," said the son of Mars, bowing, and grinning with consummate impudence.

"Commend me to height sometimes, at least," said Lady H——.

"I declare that man has loosened my *bandeau*," said Lady D——, much discomposed. "I wonder who in their senses would come to court, to have their clothes really pulled off their backs. There again! another tug, quite destroying my trimming. Oh! look at my poor roses."

"Oh! pray, Lady D ——, don't move," said Lady H——; "my lappets are fast to your comb."

"Sir! your hat is in my eye," said Lady B——, with offended stateliness.

"A thousand pardons!" replied a grey-headed General; "I would remove myself if I could, 'pon honour! Heavens, what a push! I am afraid I hurt your ladyship."

"Bless me, what is the matter?" screamed

out Miss S——; "why do the people crowd so behind? I shall be off my legs."

"Oh! my fan, my fan!" exclaimed Lady S——; "that lady has knocked my fan out of my hand."

"It cannot be helped, my lady; you must leave it to its fate; no one can stoop to look for it here."

The Birmingham party had been making the best of their way through the crowd towards where the sovereign stood, when they, like those we have been describing, were forcibly thrown back by a sudden rush from behind: an *entrée* through the crowd was effected literally by main force for a party of distinction, who proved to be no other than Lady Hauton, followed by the Baroness de Wallestein and Miss Louisa Mildmay, both of whom her ladyship was to present. Grace might perhaps have been in all their steps, if they had had space to show them off in: but any one who has ever attended the

drawing-room—and who has not?—must know that you might as well look for grace in a bear-garden.

"*Ah! mon Dieu, comme on arrange cela différemment aux Tuileries!*" said the Baroness, after the important presentation had been effected. "Louisa! my love! do you remember what an affair the letting down one's train was? —*une affaire de grace.*"

"Oh! to be sure! and the dear *garde de corps*, who stood on every step of the stairs, and one was obliged to *saluer* each in his turn."

"Oh! very well," said Lord George, who had joined them, and to whom this was addressed; "*saluer* as much as you please, provided you don't say salute."

"Such a good scene as I once witnessed there!" said the Baroness. "Two very handsome Englishwomen, after being presented to the King of France, stood and chatted with much *sang froid* with his Majesty, to the great amusement of all the officers who were in service

behind the throne. After the king had finished with his *charmantes Françaises*, he wished to see these English ladies again, and he desired little Madame de Rosbuck—you remember Madame de Rosbuck, Louisa, and her fine mosaics—to tell them he wanted to speak to them. Madame de Rosbuck gave the message with much importance, after having pierced the crowd with some difficulty in search of the ladies. Conceive her surprise, when the elder of the two answered, '*Dites au roi, Madame, que je ne peux pas, parceque je cherche mon mari.*'—'*Mon dieu, dire cela au Roi!*' said a chorus of incensed French ladies. The message, however, was given literally, and his Majesty with his well-known grace observed; '*Allons, ce serait dommage de brouiller un si bon ménage.*' "*

"Now if we stand here a few minutes," said Louisa, "we shall just catch Barbara: see! she

* This happened at the court of Charles X. in the winter of last year.

is before the king now. How well she looks! how those feathers become her! what a colour she has got! There! now it 's over: well, she really does look beautiful!"

"Sweet creature!" said the Baroness; "and I have that to tell her which will not lessen her colour. Louisa, you must keep my lady in talk, while I whisper a few words of comfort to the dear girl."

"Upon my soul, now, it 's a pity poor Lionel isn't here," said Lord George, "to see her in all her glory. He 'd be more smitten than ever with her, in those plumes."

Lady Birmingham now advanced in full-blown majesty: the Baroness paid her compliments most graciously to the important dame; and then Louisa, with considerable ingenuity, entangled her ladyship in a long and involved narrative about her arrangements for her ball. Lord George assisted in lengthening the details, by well-feigned astonishment and pertinent re-

marks. Meanwhile, Madame de Wallestein led the trembling Barbara to a corner, near one of the windows, where there was an open space. "Lean on me, my dear girl; let me fan you. Bless me, how you shake!"

"Oh, it will be nothing! but I have been much agitated: last night—you probably heard?"

"Oh! I know it all; and I led you here to console you."

"How!" said Barbara, examining the Baroness's countenance with intense anxiety.

"*Allons! du courage.* There has been no duel; and Lord K—— and my brother shook hands after the explanation had taken place, and parted good friends last night. Will that satisfy you?"

"And where is ——"

"Where is Lionel? I know you would ask: *il est parti; parti pour Paris, à sept heures ce matin.* He sent to wake me this morning, to bid

me adieu, and to tell me what had happened. He is gone *pour des affaires très importantes*, but of what kind I did not hear."

"Oh, how you have relieved me," said Barbara, and her eyes filled with tears. "But will he be long away?"

"I know not; he would not say: but I am sure, *il brule d'impatience d'être de retour*. And is that all you ask?—*petite cruelle!*

Barbara's looks were all anxiety, she pressed Madame de Wallestein's hand in silence.

"*Et vous croyez qu'il est parti sans dire un mot pour vous: tout de bon, vous pouvez vous imaginer cela.*"

"Oh, tell me all, for pity's sake!" dear Madame de Wallestein."

"Pity, indeed! he is most to be pitied, I think—*lui qui est obligé de s'en aller, et qui vous laisse ici entouré d'admirateurs.*"

"But tell me, what did he say?"

"Why he said,—he said—how shall I tell it in pretty words enough? *Que la scène d'hier*

ne s'effacerait jamais de son souvenir, qu'il croirait toujours vous voir étendu sans mouvement dans ses bras, et qu'il reviendrait bien vîte, pour se mettre où il voudrait mourir, ou bien vivre, je l'espère, à vos pieds."

Barbara looked as much confused as if Lionel had said it all to her *in propriâ personâ.*

The wicked little Baroness enjoyed her distress. "One word more, my dear Miss Birmingham; he would have written to you himself, but he did not think it would be right to venture on such a decided step without your approbation; but he seized this seal from my escritoir, and begged me to present it to you *de sa part.*"

The motto was "*Dinna forget.*"

Barbara hid the seal within her bosom: "And when you write," said she, with a voice trembling with emotion, "tell him that constancy shall be my motto."

"*Costante per la vita,* of course," said Madame de Wallestein, "the *refrain* of all

love-sick damsels. But here is Lady Birmingham come after us. Dry your tears, my love; I will not ask you to hide your blushes, they are so becoming." Then advancing to meet the consequential lady, Madame de Wallestein said with the greatest *sang froid:* "I fear I have detained my young friend too long; I was joking her upon her fine bloom; I felt convinced your ladyship had rouged her, as mammas are too apt to do in France."

"Fortunately, Miss Birmingham has no occasion to use art," said her ladyship, with much pomposity. "But, indeed, she has more colour than usual; the idea of coming to Court, I believe, always agitates young nerves like hers. I was quite vexed last night at that foolish fainting business, it made her look so silly; but I am glad to find no mischief has happened between the young men: quite friends again, I am told, before they parted. And pray what has become of the gallant colonel? Why is he not here? Like the rest of the world!" and

Lady Birmingham's eyes assumed their most scrutinizing expression.

"Lionel went off this morning for Calais," replied Madame de Wallestein; "he is going to Paris *pour des affaires*, but of what sort I know not."

"To Paris, indeed! well, that is strange. What, is the Signora there?"

"The Signora,—may I ask who? I know nothing of any Signora; Lady Birmingham, what do you mean?"

"Oh! my dear Madame de Wallestein, this will not pass: it is impossible but that you must understand to what I allude; why, it is in every body's mouth: I cannot explain here; but I thought you must have understood."

"I can lay claim, then, to no wisdom on this subject, Lady Birmingham; for I really cannot comprehend to what you allude."

"What was the cause, then, of the quarrel last night?" said Lady Birmingham, in an audible whisper.

"Have you not asked your daughter, then?" said the Baroness, turning her head round to look at Miss Birmingham; who was standing at a little distance, where she could not but hear the whole of this distressing conversation. Her eyes were fixed upon the ground, in what Miss Edgeworth, I remember, calls "penetrative shame;" but the Baroness's appealing look distressed her so much, that she had not spirit left to repel the charge it appeared to impute to her. Lady Birmingham eyed her daughter in perfect silence, astonished at the distress pictured in her countenance: she changed in a moment from being perfect scarlet to a death-like hue: the Baroness thought she was going to faint again; but she dared not take any notice.

"What is all this about?" said the mother, with much displeasure; "what has my Barbara to do with it?"

"Do not distress her just now," said Madame de Wallestein, in a whisper; "but you know the quarrel last night must have been

something about dancing with her. Better say nothing more at present. But the men are all so jealous too, *et il faut bien leur pardonner aussi.*"

"Pardon, indeed!" said her ladyship; somewhat re-assured, yet still considering her daughter: then turning round she added, in an under tone, "If I could only be convinced this was really the case, and it certainly does look like it,—"

At this moment Louisa joined them: "See how Lord Killarney is attracting every body's notice," said she—"and with his right-arm in a sling too? I wonder what that means!"

Barbara involuntarily turned her head, while Lady Birmingham watched her every motion, and the Baroness stood contemplating her ladyship's anxious, inquisitive countenance. It was indeed Lord Killarney, his fine figure set-off to the greatest advantage by a splendid uniform; the right-sleeve was cut open and tied with bows, and the arm rested in a graceful sling;

while on the left hung Lady Anne Norbury; she seemed to lead him on in a kind of triumph. Lady Norbury went first, looking all delight, and turning her head round incessantly to see if "her young people" followed close. Poor Barbara felt a kind of icy shiver creeping over her; she got as close as she well could to the Baroness, whom she seemed to consider a kind of protection.

Lady Birmingham looked her boldest look at the Norbury party, who were now approaching towards the King.

Various were then the audible whispers, which might be heard on all sides. The words, "Duel."—"Wounded."—"Lord Killarney and Colonel Montague."—"Very handsome."—"In love."—"Miss Birmingham."—"Great heiress."—"Italian mistress."—"Very odd." Then shoulders shrugged and necks stretched, and some stood on tip-toe to peep. Others with their glasses up—to criticise Lord Killarney: these were of the softer sex. The bolder lords of the

creation ventured farther, even so far as a broad stare at Miss Birmingham. Lady Birmingham saw it all, and felt it in various ways,—first surprised, and then flattered; for she saw that her daughter produced a great sensation—just what she wished: at Court too, which was more than she had ever dared to hope, in her most ambitious moments. Then Barbara's name and Lord Killarney's were evidently associated together by every body; certainly the first step gained. Lionel too was gone away, had quitted the field voluntarily. What could be looked for next? What! but the consummation of all her hopes:—a splendid establishment for her daughter.

Soon after, Mrs. Metcalf came up to Lady Birmingham, and told her in a whisper, "that his Majesty had sent for Lord Killarney back, to enquire why his arm was in a sling?—and he had told him all about the affair at Almack's; and about Miss Birmingham's fainting away too!—and then his Majesty, with one of his

most gracious smiles, had said he must congratulate him upon his generosity, in trusting the future Lady Killarney in his rival's arms! He seemed so great a favourite, that it was whispered about, he would very probably be the new lord of the bed-chamber." Mrs. Metcalf declared, that "In her whole life she had never known any affair cause such a sensation before at the drawing-room, since the day when Charles Fox kissed hands as prime minister! when all the world were on tip-toe, to know how he would fasten on a bag to his crop head! and when she had stood by old Lady Denham, the Baroness in her own right, and heard her say to a Right Reverend Bishop, holding up her venerable hands, 'My Lord, I am an old woman, and I have seen many strange sights in my life; but so strange a sight as this, of Charles Fox kissing hands on being appointed prime minister to George the Third, I never did expect to see!'"

But enough of old Mrs. Metcalf and her

reminiscences. Luckily for Barbara, she had not heard a syllable of this long story; for just then Lord George had taken pity upon her distress, and, coming up to her, was good-naturedly trying to rally her spirits, by telling her in a whisper that he did not think Lionel would be long detained in Paris; that he believed the misunderstanding had been satisfactorily explained; and that it had given him much pleasure to hear from his friend's own mouth, that his brother Killarney had behaved most handsomely.

Barbara listened, all attention, while her eyes glistened with pleasure. "Public curiosity! and royal notice too!" thought Lady Birmingham, as she walked to the other end of the room with a firmer step and a more stately air than she had ever done before.

"Stop, Lady Birmingham!" said Lord Mordaunt, arresting her progress, "you must not fly in this way! Here is my cousin Killarney, the Great Unknown himself! desires to be in-

troduced in due form to you and Miss Birmingham. This wounded knight begs to apologize, with all humility, for the alarm he occasioned you last night at Almack's."

Lord Killarney bowed with the utmost gravity to Barbara, who began to think her troubles that day were never to end. Then turning to Lady Birmingham, with a still more profound obeisance he said, in a subdued, yet distinct tone of voice—"Your ladyship did me the honour to bestow on me, last night, a title of which any man might be proud: I fear you will henceforward designate me, with greater truth, 'the Little Unknown!' with which name I must rest satisfied; provided only that you will allow me the privilege of being not unknown to you! Miss Birmingham," continued his Lordship, "will, I trust, forgive all my last night's indiscretions; and particularly the alarm I so unintentionally occasioned her; when I declare, that I never met with a more generous fellow than my

gallant friend Colonel Montague! I shall always feel a regard for him, from his late conduct to me!" He added, in a low whisper, "I deserved his attack upon me, though it was, perhaps, made in rather too public a manner; and I should certainly not have wished you, in particular, to witness our little misunderstanding;—but our feelings were excited, and we were both to blame; but I far the most, I can assure you! I see you look anxiously upon my wounded arm: a poor harmless scar I got last night; of little consequence but as it was in rescue of Colonel Montague."

"Good God!" exclaimed Barbara, breathless with astonishment and alarm:—"What do you mean?"

"The Colonel and I," continued Lord Killarney, "agreed to go home together to my lodgings, where I promised to give him a full explanation of what had so much irritated him: he offered to drive me there in his cabriolet. We had not gone far, before his horse became

very unruly. I saw that your friend, though daring to a degree, was no whip. I take it, too, he must be very short-sighted, for we were on the verge of a most awkward place indeed—where the road had been repairing,—just opposite the Argyll Rooms. I saw that not a moment was to be lost, so I jumped out, and succeeded at last in stopping the furious animal, but not without some difficulty, and at the expense of my right arm, which I bruised a good deal against one of the shafts, in trying to make him turn. My showing myself here in this disabled state is indeed foolish enough, for all the world of course suppose me the victim of a duel. His Majesty," continued Lord Killarney, in a very humble tone, " was even kind enough to enquire in what affair of honour I had been engaged. My motive in coming here, however, I trust you will pardon, since it was simply no other than to tell you of Montague's safety, as I knew he had to leave England instantly. I would fain hope that this candid

confession will reinstate me in your good opinion: I do not wish in any way to interfere with prior engagements, but I trust you will consider me henceforth in the light of a friend. Forget my masquerade character on Monday night, my foolish conversation at Almack's yesterday; permit me to enter on a new leaf, and thus let me seal our peace." He held out his left hand to her; embarrassed as poor Barbara was, she could not refuse to take it; but Lord Killarney was too precipitate for her, —with a sudden impulse, he violently seized her hand, and pressed it gallantly to his lips.

It was done, and so instantaneously too, that even had she been prepared for this unexpected motion, she could not have prevented it. Fortunately, Lord Mordaunt had kept Lady Birmingham in close conversation about the arrangements for her ball. Her ladyship still was highly delighted to see the long and interesting *tête-à-tête* going on between her daughter and my lord; more especially, as she observed that

all the world were looking at them: the smile of triumph that sat upon her brow could not be concealed. She had also another source of happiness; for that dear, good-natured Lord Mordaunt was announcing to her that Lady Hauton consented, at his request, to patronize her ball, and wished to be introduced to her ladyship immediately.

"Would she like it?"

"It was what she was dying for."

So Lady Birmingham was dragged up forthwith to the Countess, who chose to sport the haughty condescension of an ultra exclusive to the modest *débutante* of fashion, who was, of course, flattered to excess. There was now only one more wish ungratified, which Lady Birmingham had long boldly speculated upon in her mind's eye, though she yet could hardly dare to breathe it; yet perhaps, through Lady Hauton's kind assistance, she might venture to hope to be presented to the Duke of Castlemaine,

the great magnet among the party-giving bachelors of fashion.

Lady Hauton drew up instantly; she could not undertake to promise—could not feel certain. The Duke was so exceedingly particular,—so cautious how he increased his acquaintance,—so exclusively select. Lady Hauton, however, still ventured to flatter Lady Birmingham with the pleasing idea, that, out of friendship to the Countess, if she made a point of it, he would perhaps for once relax, and look in at her ball for a few minutes; but her ladyship was sorry to say her interest extended no farther; she could give her *protegée* no hopes of his Grace inviting her to his *petits soupers*—that was beyond her ladyship's influence, all powerful even as was her sway. Still, Lady Birmingham was perfectly satisfied: there is a mystery in a diplomatic promise which has a particular charm in it; and her most extraordinary success in the fashionable world, this

very eventful day, made her feel like a successful player at chess, who has arranged every piece with such skill that the most indifferent move tends to the advantage of the game.

"So, my lord," said Colonel Leach, addressing Lord Killarney, "you have entered the lists, I hear: you mean to run for the Birmingham plate."

"*Eh! que voulez vous, mon ami?*" said his lordship, shrugging up his shoulders. "It's the thing of the year; and, after all, one must have some object in this cursed dull world of ours."

CHAPTER IX.

THE VISITING-BOOK.

"'Tis doubt! 'tis darkness! till suspended Fate
Assumes *her* nod to close the grand debate."
YOUNG.

ALL was now activity and bustle at Birmingham House, for the approaching ball. Lady Birmingham had committed the care of herself and her conscience, in the form of her visiting-book, into the hands of Lady Hauton; and much and long had the Countess to labour, in order to weed away all Lady Birmingham's real friends and connexions from the important list. In this refined age, relationship goes for nothing: the freemasonry of *set* is every thing.

"So much do I think of it," said Lady Hauton, "that, I assure you, in a certain way I always cut my own mother; I never ask her to my *choisies*. She is not in the least *des notres*, and would be quite *de trop*, so I only admit her to my squeezes. When I first married, I was young and inexperienced: one night, I remember, at Lady Norbury's, I was going up to chat with my sister, Lady Richmond; but Hauton, who was always the finest of the fine, pulled me back: 'I have at last got you into good company, my dear Georgiana,' said he; 'and really I must keep you there.'"

"Bless me!" said Lady Birmingham, quite naturally; "and Lady Richmond your ladyship's own sister too; and married to a Peer! How strange!"

"I should have lost *caste* by being with her and all that sort of set," said the Countess; "and really, if I have to do with it, Lady Birmingham, your ball must be entirely composed

of what every body calls good company—of real *ton*. Now let me look at your list."

Do not be frightened, good reader! We are only going to give a sample of Lady Hauton's mode of proceeding, as she cast her eye over this important state-paper: though, by the way, we would not advise the most official of fathers or husbands to treat such a document with contempt, or to despise the pursuit of *ton*. Let him remember that a majority of exclusives at an assembly is quite as important to a party-giving leader, as a majority of votes in the House of Commons to a ministerial *chef de parti*.

"Chacun a son but dans ce bas monde."

She would lead the fashionable, he the political world; he counts noses, she thinks more of eyes; he estimates acquired influence, she personal advantages; and both patronize nobility. But, to return:—the list filled several sheets, it had been written out over and

over again by poor Barbara, who was as sick of the sight of it, as any idle schoolboy is of his corrected copy of nonsense verses. Lady Hauton took it home with her, and returned it with pencilled notes and comments, opposite many of the names. As thus:—

4 Carltons.	Humdrums; barely admissible though a Duke's daughter; but his grace the Duke of Clanalpin is nobody.
3 Derwents.	If you 've many other grandees, don't ask them, they are such frights.
2 Tresilians.	Countrified and useless, and she takes so much room.
2 Sydenhams.	Second rates; but one sees them, and she gives things, and will do to talk to the Royal Dukes.
1 Metcalf.	Horrid creature, but every body knows her.
1 Bevil.	Oh! impossible to leave her out; she must be asked.
1 Bucannon.	My aversion; but we must have her to get men.
1 Leslie.	High time she should withdraw.
3 Beaulieus.	Handsome dashers. Of course to be asked.
2 Townshends.	If you ask them, make them bring Lord Appleby.

2 Wallesteins. No Ball is any thing without her; make her promise to come, and bring lots of Germans with her: they waltz so well.

1 Mildmay. Quite *ton,* and ensures Lord George Fitzallan.

Then Barbara was made really miserable, by the way in which several of the oldest friends her mother had in the world, were ridiculed. Few of these had Lady Birmingham even ventured to put down; but there were some, just one or two, she hardly could venture to forget: of these were the three Miss Claypoles, excellent old maids, the daughters of a Dr. Claypole, who would have been a Bishop had he lived. These ladies had known something of Governor Mildmay; and had Lady Birmingham not married when she did, they had offered her an asylum in their house; and, when she returned a widow from the West Indies, they were the first among her acquaintance to visit her: but they were neither young nor fashionable, and Lady Hauton wrote against their names, " Hop-pole,

May-pole, and Clod-pole; the sooner you cut such sticks the better: of all things avoid odd names and odd people, when you give a party, as you would the pest."

Then there was a Mrs. Hill, and two Miss Hills, her nieces; most intimate friends of Sir Benjamin's. The girls had been Barbara's particular cronies from her infancy; their uncle had been the little Baronet's protector in India; the aunt had procured Lady Birmingham most of her London acquaintance;—but what was that to Lady Hauton? When she discovered these were the Indian Hills, living in Devonshire-place, she wrote underneath their names, "Positively I will have no curry or mulligatawney. Leave out Sand-hill, Chalk-hill, and Ant-hill." The young ladies had each of them singular-coloured hair, and this Lady Hauton knew: indeed what was there she did not know?—the most ridiculous piece of gossip, about the most insignificant person, was sure to be welcome to her ladyship. Two Mr. Boodles, whom Lady

Birmingham had hitherto considered very fine men, much about town, her ladyship marked with her displeasure as Noodle and Doodle, and they never lost the name. Indeed, she considered herself particularly happy in these hits. There was a very conceited Mr. Middleton, whom she always hurt to the quick by calling him very distinctly to his face, Middle–*ton*: but that even was better than poor Mr. Little–*ton*, as she always pronounced the name of another dandy. And the fine Mr. Norton came off worst of all, as she generally called him No–*ton*:—and this was all to illustrate her own name, Haut–*ton*. A bet was once laid, that she would call a certain distinguished Duke, *Vilain–ton*, to his face:—but for the truth of this story I will not vouch.

Then followed the Countess's own list, of all that she herself had asked; all real *haut ton*, the very cream of fashion. To every one of whom she had said, "You need take no sort of notice of the old Birminghams, unless you want to laugh at them; for they are capital fun for a

little time. But the girl is good-looking, and is really worth something, for she will have an enormous fortune. And there will be oceans of champagne, and the finest supper Gunter ever produced: and such loads of fruit coming up from the country on purpose! waggon loads of peaches and nectarines! So it's sure to be a famous ball, for I've asked all the world, and these Birminghams are so rich they don't care how much they spend. Some people think the daughter is to marry that spendthrift, my cousin Killarney; if so, he will help them off with some of their superfluity. But I'll promise you one good thing, however, the Duke of Castlemaine has promised to go to this ball, upon my honour!" And her ladyship knew full well what magic there was in his grace's name among a certain set.

Lady Birmingham was a good deal surprised to find how little weight rank had with the countess. It seemed to be as nothing, unless fashion had also stamped her seal upon the coronet.

Then there were also some minor difficulties to be conquered:—Friends not to be found out till after the important night was over; to be supposed not come to town. Others, that were really come, and who had called, were to be forgotten. "It is certainly very provoking how all one's odd-looking acquaintance should arrive the night before one's ball, just in time to remind one," observed the ball-giving Lady Birmingham to Lady Hauton.

"Oh! invariably. Shall I tell you how to avoid them another time, and save your conscience too. Go out of town two days before your ball, and do not look at a single note or card, for your life. Bid your porter toss them all into a box, and then look them over the next morning for amusement; that's my way."

Another thing struck Barbara, to whom the whole was new, as most curiously absurd—Lady Birmingham submitted, without a murmur, to the strange decree, that she should not invite one single person of her own acquaintance, with-

out her patroness's special permission; yet every one of the friends of Lady Hauton's friends could obtain invitations without difficulty. So that it became the fashion for the rejected to say, "Oh! I am not going, for I visit Lady Birmingham."

Then Mrs. Bucannon was the grand contractor for men; and Barbara became sick at heart when she spied one of her three-cornered notes with petitions for cards, which Miss Birmingham was to fill up with the names of some of the widow's *protégés*. But then, in return, she was promised that there would be all the men in London at her ball; never had there been any party in such request. And Lady Hauton said on Monday morning, "Now, Lady Birmingham, be firm, and refuse all farther applications, and let the rejected hang themselves for vexation. Any desirable man will be sure to manage to get in somehow; will come perhaps without an invitation; or get somebody to bring him."

And Lady Birmingham read her list over

again, and thought how well it would grace the "Morning Post" after her ball; and then she fidgeted up and down stairs, while Gunter was arranging about the supper-tables, and Hancock's superintendent was projecting about the lights, and Soho's men moving the furniture. And Barbara—she sat alone, musing upon the follies and vanities of fashionable life,

"So weak, so heartless, and withal so dull."

Her mother, meanwhile, fancied herself perched upon the very pinnacle of *ton*. But stop awhile, fair lady! the ascent is rugged enough, and, when at the top, you will find it no easy resting-place.

"Malicious Fate" had decreed that Lady Birmingham should not have all the world in a string on the night of her ball, even though it was patronized, and she was produced, by the all-powerful Lady Hauton. Lady Norbury was vexed beyond all human endurance at the extraordinary way those Birminghams were getting on in the world. So many of her set

going over to the enemy, was enough to provoke any one. Then, to enrage her still more, Lord Norbury, who knew his son well, felt convinced that Mordaunt would never pay such devoted attention to Lady Birmingham in public without a good reason; and was therefore constantly alluding to the probability of the heiress becoming their daughter-in-law at last. If this nearly drove Lady Norbury mad, the seeing Lady Hauton take up these people, and ask the Duke of Castlemaine to their ball, roused every particle of spirit in her angry breast; and she determined she would have her revenge. This she accomplished, by getting Lady Rochefort to give a rival party on the same night. This would also answer two ends; Lady Norbury knew the *liaison* which at least *had* existed between her son and Lady Rochefort, who entered readily into Lady Norbury's scheme of a rival coalition. The Countess felt convinced, that unless her son was decidedly after Miss Birmingham, he must be at his

enchanting little Viscountess's *petit souper*, which would be a *réunion* of the most *recherché* people of the *haut ton*—the choice spirits of the highest set.

Lady Hauton was much provoked at her dear friend Lady Rochefort, for intending to spoil the so much talked-of ball: however, she determined that puffing it to every body would be the best way to make it go off well. Lady Norbury did the same about Lady Rochefort's. The partizans of the two factions followed the example of their leaders; and it became quite a party business. Lady Birmingham, on the first news of the thing, at the instigation of Mrs. Bucannon, wrote to ask Lady Rochefort to put off her *little* party. The Viscountess answered that it was too late now; but had she only been told of her ladyship's *large* party sooner, she would not have chosen that night. Lady Hauton was very angry when she heard of Lady Birmingham having stooped so low. Then the Rochefort party tried to bribe Colli-

net to desert to them; but gold carried the day with him—he knew pretty well where he should be best paid.

To make Lady Rochefort's thing more *recherchée*, it was decided that it should be a *petite comedie*: she would have the French actors from the Argyle Rooms.

"And the end of it will be," said Mrs. Bucannon, who was trumpeter to the Birmingham faction, "that they will all go away for the supper at Birmingham House: the play will do vastly well for the beginning, till they grow hungry."

"But there is to be waltzing, and Polonnaises, and Mazonetas afterwards, at Lady Rochefort's," said Mrs. Sydenham; "and the Duke of Castlemaine has promised her too."

"I beg your pardon, his Grace is certain to be at Lady Birmingham's; that I happen to know from undoubted authority," said Mrs. Bucannon decidedly; "and Lord Killarney."

"I should doubt him," said Mrs. Sydenham,

smiling; "wherever Lady Norbury and Lady Anne go—and they are certain to patronize this *petite comedie*—there you may depend upon seeing Lord Killarney."

"And why, pray? because he is first-cousin to Lady Anne, do you mean to say that he must attend her of necessity?"

"No! not exactly that; but I will back Lady Anne against the heiress, as an attraction to his lordship"

"That will not I!" replied the widow; "I will lay any body ten to one on Miss Birmingham. But I must be off; for I have to walk all the way to Park-street, Westminster, with a message from Lady Birmingham to the Bartletts."

"Good heavens! Mrs. Bucannon, you are not going to ask that great red-faced Mrs. Bartlett and her scarecrow daughters?"

"No! not that exactly; but it 's a provoking job enough I have got to do. Last year Lady Birmingham was not fine at all, and she was dying to get to a very famous concert Mrs.

Bartlett gave, where all the opera-people sang; and I managed it for her; and now I am going to explain how sorry Lady Birmingham is that she cannot ask them to her ball. *Entre nous*, Lady Hauton will not hear of them, and you know she rules every thing; so I am going to smooth matters, and to offer Lady Birmingham's opera-box for to-morrow night instead to the poor dear Bartletts."

"Ha, ha!" said Mrs. Sydenham, "a propitiatory offering. Well, adieu! Mrs. Bucannon: we shall meet to-morrow night at the ball, but it will be late: I must see all the French play, it is the sort of thing I so delight in."

"What a useful creature that Mrs. Bu is!" said Miss Sydenham, as soon as the widow's back was turned; "the go-between for every body."

"That's the way the good soul gets on," said the mother: "I often wonder what makes Jane Leslie and her go to Almack's, and all those places; but, to be sure, they see what 's going on

among their acquaintances, and so they become *au fait* of every thing and every body, learn to know the features of all the leading men and women, and hear all the gossip."

CHAPTER X.

THE BALL AT BIRMINGHAM HOUSE.

"I've seen some balls and revels in my time,
And staid them over for some silly reason;
And then I look'd (I hope it was no crime)
To see what lady best stood out the season."

BYRON.

ON Tuesday, the 1st of May, about eleven o'clock, the carriages began to arrive: they continued setting down, without intermission, till past midnight; and then what a glorious assemblage of grandees were collected together! The house was magnificent beyond description, and illuminated in the most brilliant style. Five grand apartments were open *en suite*, and terminated in a beautiful conservatory, filled

with rare plants from the Abbey, whose rich perfume added another charm to this enchanting Elysium. Wind-instruments were played at intervals to relieve Collinet's inspiring band. Then there was the charming little boudoir, so arranged as to form a safe retreat for flirtations, or interesting *tête-à-têtes*. The King of Pinks himself would have been delighted with the profusion of sweet carnation and lovely rose-buds, which were there placed but to be stolen. The refreshments were, of course, luxurious in the extreme ; and the sum said to have been expended in strawberries alone was really frightful. The richly-embossed gold plate was all displayed. It was massive in the extreme. The feelings of many of the young men may be conceived, as they walked about contemplating this magnificent display of wealth, which would all descend to one fair creature, who might very easily have been loved for herself alone.

Lady Birmingham was never in her life so

thoroughly happy as at this moment, when filling up her door-way, receiving all the illustrious of the land, and saying nearly the same thing to all. Oh! what a wearisome office, if it were not for the honour of the thing! Endless were the exclamations of wonder and surprise at the magnificence of the house; but fashionable people never admire. Having once spoken to the lady of the mansion, the grandees all congregated round Lady Hauton, the real mistress of the revels, who had indeed collected a very pleasant assemblage of her own particular set, who were carrying on much amusing conversation—the useless efforts of wealth to procure fashion, the vulgarity of upstart pretensions, and many other equally polite and appropriate remarks.

Colonel Leach set off a whole circle of what are called "young men about town," by proposing that they should cut poor dear Sir Benny, and send him to Coventry, by ejecting him out of the principal apartments. The idea

of the fellow fancying they meant to associate with him, because they honoured his house with their presence!

The proudest of the proud, the aristocratic Prince Alfred de Steinberg, (though, by the way, he was not of so great a family, or of so ancient a race, as his friend the young Count de Rosenval, of whose family it was said *avant eux le déluge,*) had been long enough now in England to feel the tone of the thing in full force, to see the spirit with which the Birminghams were tolerated by the haughty exclusives among the British nobility. He made his remarks upon it, in German, to the Baron de Wallestein, with whom he had come very early. The Baroness and Louisa were gone first to the French play at Lady Rochefort's.

Sir Benjamin and Lady Birmingham wandered up and down the splendid apartments, gazing at their fine company, who were not, in truth, *du tout de leurs amis.* They seemed to

be spectators of their own show. Lady Birmingham was, however, so much pleased with the number of high-sounding names she heard announced, that it was quite impossible for her to remark the still numerous defaulters. Those were, however, registered by Lady Hauton; and she determined to visit them with her severest reprehension on the morrow, for not keeping their promises to her ladyship. In time, however, numbers came pouring in from Lady Rochefort's. But it was no easy matter now to drive up to Birmingham House; for many of those who had arrived early were intending by this time to go off to the popular little Viscountess's, who, it was said, had fascinated all her guests with her grace and wit, this evening more even than usual; and the actors had done their best too; and the whole thing had gone off so well! no bustle, no crowd, no confusion; and every body one wished to see there, though the whole house would nearly stand in one of Lady Birmingham's rooms. These

were the accounts given by those who were cross at having been kept a long time in the string coming up to Lady Birmingham's, or who had had a panel broken, or a horse lamed; and then those Mammas who did not find their set at Birmingham House, or those Misses who could not pick up partners in the crowd of men there collected, were now eager to go off to the smaller party. They hated crowds and large assemblies—little dances were so much pleasanter; and they heard, too, that all the foreigners were at Lady Rochefort's; and that made all the difference, whether a ball was pleasant or not.

There seemed a sort of pause; numbers going away, none coming in. Lady Birmingham, to whom the whole scene was something like a moving panorama, had sunk down upon a *bergère*, to rest her weary legs and still more weary eyes. Excuse her, ye party-giving matrons! ye, who know what it is to stand for several hours, to welcome five hundred select friends

coming up in rotation,—a greater fatigue than opening the budget in the House of Commons, because accompanied with less either of satisfaction or of fear. I know, indeed, of nothing at all to be compared with it, except that which His Majesty underwent upon his first drawing-room, even supposing the curtseys at any given assembly to equal the number of salutes bestowed by the royal mouth. Heavens! how the kingly operator must have wished for a pair of proxy lips! But to return from this digression:—we left Lady Birmingham in a state of pleasing inactivity; but how agreeably was she roused by the *entrée* of Silvertop himself, her distinguished groom of the chambers, to announce the Duke of Castlemaine, Lord Killarney, and Lord Hazlemere! Lady Hauton glanced at the three "desirables," as she called them, and was perfectly satisfied: she then feared for nothing.

Lady Birmingham ventured to ask the Duke if he had been at Lady Rochefort's.

"No; he had been only at the opera: generally, he never went to two things of a night; that was his Grace's rule. But having promised Lady Hauton to attend Lady Birmingham's ball—"

How pleased she felt! Lord Killarney pressed her offered hand with the greatest kindness. "Where shall I find Miss Birmingham? I must hand her down to supper."

"Of course, she expects you. I saw her dancing with Lord Mordaunt not long since. In the ball-room you will be sure to find her, my lord."

"Oh! I shall have no difficulty, my dear Lady Birmingham!" If that were but all, thought his lordship, as he pressed through the crowd.

Lord Hazlemere brought Lady Glenmore's excuses. She meant to have come; he was to have taken care of her; he had promised not to leave her; but Lady Mary Derwent had alarmed Lord Glenmore with the idea of the crowd;

and, in short, her ladyship had taken fright. She had not been very well. And Lord Hazlemere looked cross, and was evidently disappointed. He passed on, and made room for the Baroness de Wallestein, Miss Louisa Mildmay, Lord George Fitzallan, and a long train of foreigners; and Lord George set Lady Birmingham's heart quite at ease, for he declared that all who were gone, and going away, would find the lamps out at Lady Rochefort's. "Absolutely extinguished! they will be all in the dark!"

"Miss Birmingham is really a very fine girl," said the Duchess of N—— to Lady Eglantine V——, "a beautiful figure! Look, that is her in the white crape dress; I love simplicity in ornament."

"And her countenance is most pleasing: such beautiful dark eyes, and so sweet a smile!" replied Lady Eglantine.

"Yes," said the Duchess; "and she has a look of nature and innocence about her,

which is so refreshing after that 'hard parboiled look of fashion,' which I remember your friend Mr. Lester used to reprobate as so unlovely; she looks now as if she could not be ill-natured in order to show off her wit at the expense of some poor *provenciale*, who was not *au fait* of the last fashion."

"That wreath of white roses is particularly becoming," said Lady Eglantine, who was a noted *elegante;* "I suppose *ruches* are coming in again: I have not seen a dress like her's for some time; it is in very good taste."

"What a pity," said the Duchess, putting up her glass, "to sacrifice such a sweet young creature to a man like Lord Killarney, who will have no sort of feeling for that kind of amiable retiring character: he used to be talked of for that dashing Lady Anne Norbury; she would be able to manage him, perhaps. Who is dancing with Miss Birmingham now, my dear Eglantine?"

"She was dancing with Lord Mordaunt,

mamma; she opened the ball with him: you know he is decidedly one of her *pretendants* too; there is no doubt of that, I believe; and they seemed great friends, I thought. Oh! now I see she has just finished dancing with Lord Hare, Lord Bellamont's son. He will not captivate her with his wit at least; there can be no fear of that. But how odd it is, mamma, after all we have heard, that Lord Killarney should not be here. It must be all gossip, without any foundation; though they did say the King even called her Lady Killarney, at the drawing-room."

"But see; here he is himself at the door, coming in with Lord Hazlemere. There, look now, Captain Macdonald is pointing out where Miss Birmingham stands: he is going up to her, I think. No! he is stopping to talk to Colonel Leach, every body's Leach, as he is called."

"How beautiful the little Baroness de Wallestein looks to-night!" said the Duchess, "so

like a foreigner, so perfectly well dressed, so finished!"

"And that pretty girl, who always goes out with her, is going, as usual, to dance with Lord Killarney's brother, Lord George Fitzallan: that must soon be a match, I think."

Louisa pressed her friend's hand with her usual intimacy. "Oh! come into the conversatory," said Barbara, gaily; "you must look at some of the Atherford Camillas, Louisa; they are in such beauty!" As the two friends bent over the beautiful plants, which were illuminated by a thousand lamps, Barbara raised the splendid gold chain which was twisted round her neck, and at the end of it hung the little seal, with "Dinna forget" upon it.

She raised it to the light, and said, "Any news, Louisa?"

She smiling answered: "Yes, from Calais; we only heard to-day; but we expect to hear to-morrow from Paris, and then we shall know all."

"Remember I depend on you, Louisa," said Barbara.

Lord Killarney soon after approached, evidently determined on renewing his attentions to Miss Birmingham.

"A most comfortable family *coterie*, I declare! just a proper *parti quarré!* Two brothers equally happy is not an every-day sight. Come, George, lead out your lady; Miss Birmingham and I will follow." Barbara's annoyance may be better conceived than described; she, however, resolved, that though compelled to submit to his intrusions for a time, she would on no account omit showing, on every possible opportunity, that her preference was unalterably bestowed on another, and a worthier object.

"By the by," said he, as he led her to the supper-room; "did you hear what Miss Sydenham said to-night to Lord Hazlemere, at Lady Rochefort's? It was confounded hot, and he seemed to be in a fever; something on his mind, I suppose: I 'm sure I know how to pity

him. He borrowed her fan; the fair—no, I shall call her the tall—Laura, said to him with her pretty, silly lisp, 'Can you flirt a fan, my lord?'—'No,' said he, sulkily; 'but I can fan a flirt.' And he raised forthwith such a Zephyr, that all the *chaperons* trembled for their false hair: and Colonel Leach made every body laugh, by calling out—'Cease, rude Boreas!'"

Much to the gratification of Lady Birmingham, Lord Killarney persisted in continuing his unwelcome attentions to Barbara during the whole of the repast, at the conclusion of which he claimed the honour of her hand to dance a quadrille; when, perceiving her uneasiness, he at length led her to the *boudoir*, and relieved her anxiety by declaring his determination to renounce his pretensions in favour of his more fortunate rival, as he now saw clearly her affections were no longer at her own disposal.

"But I must request, my dear Miss Birmingham," said he, "that we agree to keep up appearances; at least for this night only. Your

future happiness may, perhaps, depend upon it. Let not Lady Birmingham suspect," said he, "the step I have now taken. No! after this private conversation, we must appear as we have done; and you must, therefore, promise to dance once more with me."

She paused for a moment, and then said with spirit, "I believe you, Lord Killarney; painful as has been this last half-hour to both of us, I trust to your honour: take my hand."

He pressed it to his lips, then seizing her fan he exclaimed, "By this I swear,"—when a voice behind him called out, "A solemn oath, upon my honour! why, you know you swear by Styx, my lord."

"Confound that meddling fellow!" said Lord Killarney, as he looked his fiercest look at the intruder, Leach. Then, trying to appear composed, he said, "When you are sufficiently recovered from your fatigue, Miss Birmingham, shall we rejoin the dancers?"

She could have no alternative. He led her

in a kind of triumph through the group of peepers that had collected round the door, which Colonel Leach had purposely left open. Her nervous timidity, the incessant variations of her countenance, the agitation of her whole frame, could not but strike all who observed her; and hundreds were so employed. She had been watched into the *boudoir;* and the length of the private conference had been well commented upon.

"The morning now was on the point of breaking;
A turn of time, at which I would advise
Ladies who have been dancing, or partaking
In any other kind of exercise,
To make their preparations for forsaking
The ball-room, ere the sun begins to rise;
Because, when once the lamps and candles fail,
His blushes make them look a little pale."

By degrees the company began to depart: a set of decided dancers still kept on a sort of never-ending waltz, but at last it died a natural death.

Collinet ceased, and Lady Birmingham's splendid apartments were soon entirely deserted.

She had now time to ruminate on the events of the evening. How flattering had been the attentions of many of her distinguished visitors! how well had the ball gone off! But, to crown the whole, what more could she have wished than the prospect which she now enjoyed, of her daughter becoming the wife of the elegant and accomplished Lord Killarney? Little, indeed, did her ladyship imagine, that, at that very moment, these fond hopes had been frustrated, and that the profligate object of her wishes was speedily about, once more, to take his leave of England, as well as to withdraw himself from her daughter's society: and thus to make way for the advance of his more generous rival.

CHAPTER XI.

L'EMBARRAS DU CHOIX.

"How shall the Muse with colours faint,
And pencil black, attempt to paint
Such high-raised hopes, such chilling fears,
Entreaties, threatenings, smiles, and tears?"

Advice to Julia.

THE family in Portland Place had witnessed, with considerable uneasiness, the attentions of Lord Killarney to Barbara; and it was therefore particularly gratifying to them to learn from Lord George Fitzallan, who called on the following morning, that that extraordinary young nobleman had relinquished his pretensions in favour of Colonel Montague.

"Well! now that I have heard all this good news," said Louisa, "and that I can leave you, my dear Caroline, perfectly happy, I may as well obey Lady Anne's summons. What can she have to say to me, I wonder? I own I am all curiosity: but perhaps it may be merely to talk about Barbara. You do not happen to be going to Portman Square, Lord George, do you?"

"I shall be delighted to accompany you," replied he, with the utmost alacrity.

"I will send the footman back, Caroline, if you will call for me when you go out?"

The Baroness agreed, and Lord George Fitzallan attended Miss Louisa down stairs.

"Do you know I am delighted to have this opportunity," said he; "for I really wanted to speak to you."

"Did you, indeed!" said the unconscious Louisa; "well then, pray begin; only first cross over."

"Can you at all guess what I am going to ask you?"

"Oh! something about Opera tickets, or Almack's vouchers, I suppose: or perhaps you want me to lend you the last new novel."

"No, indeed! What I want must be a gift; I shall not be satisfied with a loan."

"Do explain, then; you tiresome creature! Tell me what it is, and I will give it you directly: that is to say, if I can."

"It is but one thing that I want of you, my dearest Louisa; and that you can and must give me. Say but the word."

In an instant his meaning flashed full upon her, and all her soul flew to her face; their eyes met, but hers sank abashed by his ardent gaze.

"You understand me now, I am sure; give me but this little hand. You know too well how long you have had my heart."

She paused a moment, for utterance; her feelings almost overpowered her; and then said in a low, yet perfectly articulate tone:

"Take it, my dear Lord George; it is all I have to give you."

How tenderly was the little hand pressed, and how eloquently was she thanked!

Before they reached Portman Square, it was all settled: Lord George, of course, had no time for any confessions! No! the confessions were all on the side of her who had nothing to confess, but that she had given him her heart long before he had asked her for it. And, in return, such vows were whispered, as, I believe, have been heard on many such occasions, both before and since!

When they reached Lord Norbury's door, Louisa felt as if she could have dropped from agitation. Lord George recommended secrecy; declared that his nerves were in such a state he could see no one just then; he could not encounter his cousin Lady Anne's wit; she would annihilate him! Where should they meet again? and when? Oh! he would dine at the Wallesteins; she might tell them, of course. She must write to Mr. Mildmay; and at night they would both go to Almack's.

Lady Anne had given orders to admit no one but Miss Louisa Mildmay; and the trembling girl was ushered into her ladyship's own private sitting-room.

Lady Anne was seated, or rather reclining, upon a sofa, apparently deep in thought; and so abstracted, that she never once noticed the nervous trepidation of her friend! After offering her hand, she said, in an absent manner, "Well, you are a good girl, to come so punctually; and I really do want your advice. I am going to prove to you, Louisa, the high opinion I have of your judgment. You must know, that since Killarney came to town, he has been a constant visitor here, some part of every day; he has been so attentive to both my father and mother, so flattering in his manner to me, that I began to think him quite an improved character. You know, or rather, you do not know, all his powers, both natural and acquired:—he can be whatever he pleases, and he chose to act the lover to me, whenever

we met. You must know perfectly, I am sure, by experience, how much a man who understands the nature of us poor women, can say, without saying any thing: and this game has Killarney played off on me for the last fortnight. At first, I listened to him for mere amusement: though I own at length he gained upon me, and that, if he had even proposed, I think I should have accepted him. But now, a perfidious wretch! I would not have him for worlds! —— Barbara Birmingham's leavings! indeed! — No, my lord! thank Heaven! I am not reduced to that yet! Now, Louisa, listen to me:—I own honestly, I never was more disappointed in my life, than when this faithless creature left the party without saying a word that I could interpret as any thing particular. Well! but what do you think happened then? why, presently after, poor dear Dorville came up, and took my hand most tenderly! And looking up with a most piteous face, with those dull grey eyes of his,

he hoped I did not mean to be always cruel to him who adored me. Then he said something very much to the purpose, about my beauty and sense: and in short, my dear, the man was jealous of Killarney; and so, his courage being worked up a pitch higher than usual, he absolutely said, in a very creditable manner—

'Will you marry me, my dear Ally Croker?' "

"And you have said 'Yes,' I hope, my dear Lady Anne?"

"Indeed, I have said no such thing! When men are so long in coming to the point, we have no need to hurry, as if we were afraid they should escape. No, indeed! I sported much surprise! Indeed, Louisa, I never was more surprised in my whole life! I thought of your old saying: "*Quand on n'a pas ce que l'on aime, il faut aimer ce que l'on a.*" So I thanked him very prettily for his kind partiality and, flattering preference, &c.: pretended, of course

never to have suspected it:—we had seen so little of him since we came to town!—and—then, at last, I said I would give him his answer at Almack's, to-night. If I accept him, I am to take his lily-white hand when he offers it to me, on first entering!"

"And was he satisfied?" asked Louisa.

"Satisfied! oh, you never saw such raptures in your whole life: he was like something mad, and I could hardly persuade him to moderate his transport, so as not to excite the observation of all the rational people present. I was amused, because he seemed to have no sort of doubt about my accepting him at last; which, *entre nous*, whatever I do now, I had not the least decided upon then. When I got home, I had a long tirade, of course, from poor mamma: she had marked Killarney's attentions; and she was in such hopes, such spirits! But I had resolution to keep my own counsel, so she knows nothing farther than what she saw; namely, that I made myself very

particular, and must, of course, be talked about by well-behaved people, like Louisa Mildmay. But, lo and behold! this morning brought me a little twisted note from Lady Hauton. Here it is:—

"My dear Anne,—Beware of the serpent Killarney; I fear he is a double dealer. Do not commit yourself with him too far:—at least enquire how he went on at the ball at B——— House last night.

"Yours ever,

"Georgiana H."

On the receipt of this, I sent off to beg to speak to you; as I knew you would have observed the whole of his proceedings, and my mind began to misgive me about his daily visits to those *parvenus*. Oh! could my mother know that the heiress had rejected him, I believe she never would recover it. Her daughter to be second after Miss Birmingham! Her

indignation would know no bounds. Well, my dear! just after I wrote to you, which I did *en robe du chambre*, my maid informed me that my Lord Killarney was in my lady's dressing-room, and wished particularly to speak to me. I sent word I was ill, and could not admit him; but begged he would write what he had to tell me. Presently I received this little packet:—

"Brilliant as you looked last night, your illness this morning must be all a pretence not to see me. Cruel girl! you must have discovered my secret long before this; it has trembled on my tongue several times, and your attentions yesterday were so flattering, and, allow me to say, so very pointed too,—that I think I might even have ventured then to open my heart to you without fear. *Mais l'amour se plait dans le mystere:* the place was too public. And this morning you dash the cup of happiness from my very lips, by refusing to see

me! I had half a mind to force my way in, to ask you to decide the fate of yours

"Devotedly,

"K."

"I will send for an answer in an hour:—Pray be merciful. You will never repent it, *adorata cuginá mia.*"

"He has not yet sent; so now, Louisa, advise me what to do."

"But I thought you had made up your mind to refuse Lord Killarney."

"So I have nearly; for you know I am quite a *pis aller.* He only marries me because he wants a little ready money to go on with. The heiress refused him, therefore my 50,000*l.* is better than nothing. I am well aware of all that."

"Then why hesitate?" said Louisa; "your choice is surely made?"

"No, it is'nt, though! I am in a furious rage too, with Killarney: after all, he would have jilted me last night, if he could have managed

it. But he is very agreeable; and Lord Dorville is a—bore. No other word describes him so well. A creature one would fly from as a companion; and yet I am thinking of being yoked to him for—life, because he is rich, and a Viscount. I know you will tell me that Killarney is a *roué;* a man of neither principles nor conduct; whose whole life has been a course of profligacy and eccentricity. I should not hesitate, were my other choice a rational being. Such a man now as Colonel Montague I could have vowed with a safe conscience to honour and obey: I own I should like to respect my husband."

"Then you will never choose Lord Killarney. His whole character proscribes respect; he misuses all the advantages that Nature has given him."

"Certainly," said Lady Anne; "it is a hard matter to decide."

"Then why take either of them? you are not obliged to marry," said Louisa.

"Oh! I must pass the Rubicon some day, and marriage must always be a lottery: you know that, most prudent Louisa!"

"Then what will you do?"

"Marry, my dear, forthwith, and repent *à loisir*, like a sensible woman; and make the best of, probably, but a bad bargain after all. See, fair lady, what a scheme of happiness I have here drawn out. It is only *l'embarras du choix* after all. Now, I shall make you laugh."

Lady Anne held up a long paper, drawn out in two lines, and Louisa read as follows:—

"*A Marquis* (*in futuro*).

"Agreeable, witty, accomplished. A fine Corsair expression of face. The temper of a very devil. An unblushing libertine, who boasts of his profligacy. Never says a foolish thing, nor ever does a wise one. Wishes to have me for his wife, because other men admire me.

"We should quarrel di-

"*A Viscount* (*in possession*).

"A stupid, tiresome fool. *Vrai tête de Veau.* The constitutional good temper of a goose. A blank sheet of paper, free from all vice or stain. Never does a foolish thing, nor ever says a wise one. Likes me as much as he can like any thing—after himself.

"I should manage in every thing, and I should hate

rectly, yet I should, at first, be very proud of him; and he would be quite *épris* with me, and make himself very fascinating. But he would soon tire for want of variety, and he would first neglect, and then ill-treat me: and, perhaps, be very jealous. I should hate him cordially, and how it might end, heaven knows!"

my lord and master with all my soul,—for he wants the three essentials that constitute a man. In the first place, spirit,—in the second place, spirit,—and in the third place, spirit.

"If *ennui* can kill, I should be sure to die of it."

Louisa could not help laughing: "It is a scheme of misery, rather than happiness, I think," said she; "for the choice seems, to me, to lie between hatred and contempt; but one is active, and the other passive misery. Your ladyship must choose for yourself, which you prefer, *c'est selon le goût;* but I should not hesitate."

"Nor shall I, I believe; *après tout*, the woman that deliberates is lost. But I forgot to tell you, that this Lord Killarney is also engaged in some other scrape; something about that

Italian lady, who has called Colonel Montague to Paris. Well, we shall see how this ends. I think he seems to have burnt his fingers at last. They are all alike, believe me, Louisa."

A footman entered:—"Lord Killarney's servant, my lady, has called for an answer to the note he sent your ladyship."

Louisa was all curiosity to see what Lady Anne would do; what decision she would at last come to. Her surprise may be imagined, when she saw her go to the landing-place and call out to the servant, over the banisters. "My compliments—Lady Anne Norbury's compliments—to Lord Killarney, she will tell him all he wants to know at Almack's to-night. Do you hear?"

"Yes, my lady."

"The less said the soonest mended," said Lady Anne, with a laugh; "that 's my maxim, and now, my most faithful *confidente*, let me show you my new dress that I shall wear to-night, to dazzle both these *cavaliers* of mine."

Louisa looked with unfeigned astonishment, and Lady Anne laughed at her surprise. Before they parted she was sworn to secrecy, and each felt anxious for the meeting that night at Almack's.

The Baroness soon after called for Louisa, and in the pleasant intervals between visiting and shopping, she had time to tell the surprising change that had taken place in her own prospects, since they had parted in the morning. Madame de Wallestein was really enchanted, and congratulated her dear Louisa with the utmost affection.

"*Que tu seras heureuse, ma chère enfant, avec un homme que tu aimes tant; mais ce pauvre Alphonse, comme je le plains aussi*, he would not have been so bad a match either. He has such fine vineyards on the banks of the Rhine, where all the *Coti roti* comes from, which brings him in so much. *Mais enfin c'est fini pour lui, il faut qu'il cherche ailleurs.* Lady George Fitzallan, a very pretty name, truly *J'espère qu'il*

te fera un mari comme Wallestein. And where are you to live? Is the old lord rich? I should fear not; this same Lord Killarney has been so extravagant. I have heard that Fitzallan Castle is a sad, tumble-down place, and this marquis a cross old fellow, twenty years older than Lady Norbury, who is only his half-sister, *Ah! ma chère Louise, tu n'iras pas t'ensevelir au fond de l'Irlande.*

Louisa could only laugh, and assure Madame de Wallestein that she was totally ignorant on all these points, she had not even thought of any one of them. Lord George joined the Baron's family party at dinner. In order to spare the young lady's blushes, Madame de Wallestein announced the interesting secret before she appeared, both to her husband and to the two *attachés.* Poor little Rosenval could hardly conceal his vexation; he had some difficulty in commanding his temper sufficiently to pay *les complimens d'usage* to *la belle fiancée*, when she appeared. The Prince de Steinberg, who hated

his coadjutor as much as he liked Lord George, was most cordial in his good wishes. Monsieur de Wallestein was delighted; and Lord George was put into outrageous spirits by the friendly warmth with which he was received by his old friends.

"*Elle est charmante, mon cher,*" said Steinberg to him; "*La fraicheur du printemps, ce teint de lis et de roses, qu'on ne voit que dans ce pays-ci; la grace d'une Française, et de l'esprit comme on en trouve rarement, puis une gaité si agréable, un naturel qui plait tout par son égalité, et pour comble de tout comme elle t'aime! Mais elle t'adore, et elle en conviendrait même avec la plus grande franchise. Ah! quel joli menage que sera le tien!!!*" And the happy lover could never take his eyes off his sweet Louisa, and she was all smiles and all blushes, for him and for every body else. There was a look of conscious happiness about them both, which was really catching. That nothing should be wanting to complete the satisfaction of the circle,

the Baron had received most agreeable news from Lionel. He expected a few days would terminate the unpleasant business which had taken him to Paris. In about a week he hoped to find them all well and happy; and he entreated his sister would inform a certain young lady of his probably speedy return. Louisa wrote a few lines to tell Barbara of her happy prospects; and, in a postscript, she gave Lionel's message. Lord George offered to take charge of this note, when he went to dress for the ball, and he promised to deliver it himself to Miss Birmingham's maid, that there should be no fear of its not reaching her in safety. It was agreed that Louisa's secret should not be named that night at Almack's: she had no wish for that kind of publicity, and Lord George was most anxious to escape from congratulations; but he promised to be there without fail. Louisa's wish was gratified; for Madame de Wallestein, to please her, ordered the carriage half an hour sooner than usual,

so that they saw the *entrée* of the Norbury party.

The Countess entered first, on the arm of Colonel Leach. Lady Anne followed, with more than usual dignity in her air, but quite alone, which was very unusual with her; for she was always noted for having a string of attendants. The Norbury knot they were usually denominated: Lady Anne called them her humming-birds, or sometimes the band of inflictionaries. Not one of these heroes appeared to-night; till, at last, from two opposite corners were seen Lord Killarney and Lord Dorville; each advanced towards the Lady Anne, who, to their mutual surprise, took the arm of both her noble suitors, and let them attend her to a sofa, where she seated herself in great form between them; and then conversed with the utmost sprightliness and ease with both. Not so the two lords; they seemed each to have lost the power of articulation. At length her ladyship contrived to drop her

pocket handkerchief; it flew across the room, and Lord Killarney after it. He returned with a triumphant smile, much amused by this ingenious little manœuvre. *Vive les femmes*, thought he, *pour les ruses d'amour!* He presented the handkerchief with the utmost gallantry; but her ladyship drew up with considerable *hauteur*, and with a heightened colour, which added to the effect of her dazzling beauty, she said, in a low tone, "Keep it, my lord, as a *souvenir de ma part*. It will serve you at least to throw to some one else hereafter: there are other heiresses besides the Birmingham." Then, with a sudden change of countenance, she turned round to poor Lord Dorville, who sat fidgeting beside her, not knowing what to do, or think, or say.

"And are you, too, so angry, my lord, that you will not even shake hands with me?"

"Oh! with the utmost pleasure! too kind Lady Anne," said Lord Dorville, pressing the

offered hand—to his lips—he would have done, but Lady Anne stopped him, yet most graciously.

"Is this your ladyship's final answer to me?" said Lord Killarney, with some gravity.

"When I have given my hand to Lord Dorville, what other answer can you want?" said the haughty fair one.

"Hands, and not hearts, seem to be the fashion to-night," replied Lord Killarney. "I do not envy those who can be satisfied either in giving, or in receiving them; but perhaps Lady Anne Norbury thinks that '*Le jeu vaut la chandelle.*" He made her a low bow, and retired immediately. Lady Anne turned scarlet, and bit her lips with vexation, till the troublesome fondness of Lord Dorville gave her fresh food for irritation.

Lady Norbury, on her return home, was informed at the same time of the two events that had taken place in her family; of Lady Anne's

refusal of her cousin, and acceptance of Lord Dorville, and of Lord George's marriage being at last declared. Her ladyship was much agitated. Lady Anne stopped the intended lecture by seizing her mother's hand, and exclaiming, "Spare me, dear mamma! for pity's sake. I am unhappy enough, without any comments. I refuse a man that I adore, out of pique, or prudence, whichever you please to call it; and I marry a man I despise, for the same reason; and I know I shall be miserable. Such is fate."

"Or folly," said Lady Norbury, coldly.

Lady Anne sighed. "The die is cast," said she, "and I must make the best of it."

"Lord George could not help himself," observed the Countess, haughtily. "To have flirted as he has done without meaning any thing, would have been unworthy of a gentleman or man of honour. That girl, Anne, will tread in your shoes. I feel a sort of certainty, that I shall live to see her Marchioness of Al-

landale. Killarney will never marry now!" Lady Anne did not feel so certain about that. "My whole life has been a tissue of disappointments," said the Countess, as she wiped away a few natural tears; "but this, this is the severest of them all!"

CHAPTER XII.

MARIAGES D'AMOUR ET DE CONVENANCE.

"I love a ball," says one of the promising young poets in the Etonian, and so say I, and Wednesday had come round again the fatal Almack's of the second set; and all now was happiness in the Baron de Wallestein's family. Lord George had received a most delightful letter from his good old father, the Marquis of Allandale; he highly approved of his choice; he had been at college with Mr. Mildmay; he knew him to be a very popular country gentle-

man, of a most ancient and respectable family, and he made no doubt that the daughter of such a man would prove every thing that was excellent; and Lord Killarney, anxious to make some amends for all the mischief he had done, had written to beg that his father would not think of him in any way; he was not likely to marry, at least not yet; he requested, therefore, that he would settle all his unentailed property on his brother George; and he congratulated his lordship on the prospect of a daughter-in-law, who was equally beautiful and amiable. Lord Allandale, therefore, required his youngest son's presence immediately in Ireland, to sign some law-papers of great importance: he hoped to pay all his son's debts, and to be able to settle about 3000*l.* a-year upon him; but he wished him to leave the army as soon as possible, and after his marriage he and his wife must arrange to live entirely with him at Fitzallan Castle, for Lord Killarney seemed to think of going abroad again immediately, which was,

to be sure, a sad prospect for his poor father, who, at his advanced age, might never see him more.

"*Mon Dieu, vivre entièrement en Ireland! ma chère Louise, tu n'y consentiras jamais, bien sure?*" said the Baroness.

"Won't she," said poor Lord George, with a look of dismay.

"Any where with you, my dearest George," said the bride elect, with one of her sweetest smiles, "and I would not have you an absentee on any account."

"Buried in the north of Ireland, in a frightful dilapidated old castle, what will you both do? *Mourir d'ennui, vous serez reduit à cela au bout de quelques mois, c'est tout ce que vous pourrez faire.*"

"Oh! I shall turn farmer," said Lord George, "and improve the estate, and look after the tenantry, and assist the poor, and do all the good I can, and turn out a useful country squire, as all married men should do."

"*Ciel,*" exclaimed the Baroness, "what do I hear! *quitter le service à votre age,* and your beautiful uniform! what a pity, to be sure! you would never have turned Louisa's heart, but for that splendid dress, I can tell you."

"Oh! do not say so, Caroline; but I see George does not believe you; we shall be very happy I dare say, and I feel to love this dear kind lord Allandale so much for all his goodness to me, that I shall do all I can to please him; I shall play and sing to him all day long, as he is fond of music, and walk and ride with him, shall not I?" with an appealing look to Lord George.

"Yes," said he, "and then in time, you know, Louisa, your occupations may increase too; you may have other cares still to take up your time besides those of a wife and daughter; may not you, my love?"

She tried to hide a blush. "And when do you go?" said she.

"I start for Ireland at break of day to-morrow."

"So soon! I had no idea of that."

"But you will have plenty to do, fair lady, in my absence; you will go next week to Bishop's-Court, to settle all your business, shall not you?"

"Yes, M. and Madame de Wallestein have promised to take me down there, and stay—till you run away with me."

"Oh! of course; then in a fortnight I shall return to London, finish with these odious lawyers, and about the end of June I shall fly down to you, my love, and from the church-door we start for Ireland. Is not that the plan?"

"Yes," said Louisa; "and how happy should I be to hear that all poor Barbara's troubles were as delightfully over as mine promise to be soon."

"Bless me!" said the Baroness, "it is the

foreign post day; I declare Lord George has put every thing out of my head, and here is only one letter for me; now what news, I wonder!"

She read this letter in the utmost hurry and agitation. "Oh! delightful! *c'est charmant! c'est inconcevable! quel plaisir! cette pauvre Barbara;* but I will make her amends! I will do all I can to console the poor thing for her various distresses. Stay! Lady Birmingham wanted that prescription for nervous head-aches, she has suffered so much from them." The prescription was duly written out, and in the envelope, which was addressed to her daughter, was added these words:

"You must positively come to Almack's to-night, for a *very particular* reason;—send me word, yes or no."

The note was sent off directly. "We must all go to Almack's," said the Baroness: "I insist on it. Louisa, you must appear for the last time in public as Miss Mildmay, and Lord George to attend you in proper style. I know

Lady Anne Norbury is to make her appearance with Lord Dorville, and you, as one of the connexions, *ce sera tout ce qu'il faut*, what will certainly be expected."

"I shall do just what Lord George pleases, my dear Madame de Wallestein."

"If it will give you any pleasure, to see us two *en spectacle*," said Lord George, "I consent with all my heart."

"Now you are really *aimable tout de bon*, and to reward you, read that," to Louisa.

The letter seemed to make them both as happy as it had already done the Baroness. Louisa clapped her hands, and declared she was the happiest girl in the whole world; and Lord George could not bring himself to go out, till they had got Miss Birmingham's answer. It was as follows:—

"My dear Madame de Wallestein,

"I will give the prescription to Mamma;

she is much better than she has been for a long time; and, as she seemed to have set her mind on going to Almack's to-night, I had consented, though much against my will, to accompany her. After your little message, I shall go with pleasure. Oh! if you could but have felt my heart beat when I read those few words, though I know not what they really mean, but I have been in a flutter ever since.—How I shall long for eleven o'clock! My dear father is kinder than ever to me—I wish he knew all,—he has gone out airing with mamma in Hyde Park, which has given me the opportunity of writing this. Best love to Louisa.—I have had a charming letter from Julia: they are all so happy since they received her epistle, and dear Mr. Mildmay in such spirits, at the idea of the wedding and all his company. He is preparing the old brown wainscotted-room for Madame de Wallestein, where she used to sleep when she visited them formerly; and the nursery is arranging for her children; but Julia says she

shall feel very sorry when the month of June begins, with the idea that Louisa will then so soon have to leave them. She thinks this parting will be far worse than when she went over to you at Paris; for, that once settled in Ireland, she fears they shall seldom see her. Godfrey has tormented Mrs. Penelope, till she is much alarmed about the White Boys and the rebels. Mr. Mildmay says, that it is all quite right; for a woman must always bid adieu to her own family when she marries; and that Lord George ought to live in Ireland, and assist his father in looking after the estate; it is his duty. Adieu, till this evening. Ever, my dear Madame de Wallestein, most affectionately yours,

"BARBARA BIRMINGHAM."

Regent-street, Wednesday.

When at last the evening came, how busy was the Baroness in arranging Louisa's costume, what would be most proper for her in her present situation to appear in. The French abi-

gails were consulted first, her own memory ransacked next, Lord George appealed to, Madame de Wallestein questioned; they were all to say what she looked the best in. At last, M. de Rosenval pronounced that "Mademoiselle was always *charmante*, but *en blanc elle était ravissante*." "And I declare, Alphonso is right, you shall be all in white, Louisa, with a wreath of roses."

How well she looked in this vestal costume we need not describe: bright as were both her eyes, and her smiles, she would have looked well in any thing; Lord George and the little secretary were to attend them. "Does not M. de Wallestein come, too?" said Louisa.

"*Oh, oui! mais pas à present; dans une heure, une petite heure; et il nous amenera celui que nous desirons tant voir. Jusqu'à minuit, mon cher Baron*, the doors will be open," said she to her husband.

"We shall be punctual, never fear," said the Baron. And poor little M. de Rosenval, with

downcast looks, and still sadder reflection, had the honour of lending his arm to the fair Baroness; and she was followed by Louisa, in vain endeavouring to hide her blushing cheeks, which the white roses rendered still more strikingly brilliant. To avoid observation, she was too happy to retire again into a corner with him who was now the whole world to her. Never had she looked more lovely, never had he felt prouder of her charms; yet they danced the first dance together, careless who was looking at them, thinking only of themselves.

"We shall never dance together again, Louisa, after to-night," said Lord George.

"No, very true; never at least in public. I was thinking how I shall bear to live this next fortnight without seeing you, George; and I shall feel so anxious too about your passage!—that horrid sea!"

Lovers are proverbially stupid but to each other.

And all the world were at Almack's that

night; and every body was busy with their own affairs, or other people's, and Mrs. Bucannon was collecting gossip, as she sat by her friend Miss Bevil, who came, of course, to *chaperon* two of the Lady Beaulieus; and all at once the widow exclaimed:

"Lady Birmingham, as I'm alive! and her daughter too! Well, certainly wonders will never cease!"

"What is there so wonderful in that! it's a full month since the refusal."

"But haven't you heard what's to happen to-night."

"Not I! haven't heard a syllable! a marriage, or a divorce, or what?"

"Why, Miss Sydenham's marriage is to be declared to my Lord Mordaunt; and they are all to be here, and it's to be announced publicly. A brother of Mr. Sydenham's died the other day, most luckily, in the East Indies; and he has left 50,000*l.* to his niece, passing over his brother, because he's such a gambler:

and the lawyer who made the will, brought it over, and the fortune with it too, they say; and he told my Lord Mordaunt, before ever he had named it to any body else: and Mr. Sydenham luckily was gone to Epsom races; and so my lord, instead of following him there, spent the morning with Mrs. Sydenham, and proposed forthwith to Miss Laura, and was accepted by her immediately, and approved by the mamma, before ever old Sydenham knew any thing either of the lover or the legacy: so he was finely provoked, because he and my lord had had some quarrel at Newmarket some time ago; but there was no help for it afterwards, the young lady being now quite independent, and the old Don has been thus forced to give in. Lord Norbury is delighted too, for you know this girl will altogether be a very large fortune; and Lady Norbury has been vastly gracious, considering her cold nature, and her little love for her country neighbours."

"And so one must give her joy on both the

son and daughter's marriage," said Miss Bevil; "well, I shall make a point of paying all the proper civilities. How grand Mrs. Sydenham will be! finer than ever, when her daughter becomes first cousin to my Lady Hauton! and what a rage Lady Margaret Carlton will be in! What will the Duke of Clan Alpin say? Ha, ha, ha!"

"That she will; but altogether it's a nice match enough. A fine showy girl, with no pedigree, but a large fortune in ready money, and used to ton, is just the stuff for a countess. So, my Lady Birmingham sees me at last! understands my hints about a chair! there's one next me! How prodigiously well her daughter looks; decidedly handsome, with that fine colour: it must be rouge; glad to see her in spirits too. How d'ye do, Lady Birmingham? delighted to see you so much better; I had no idea you would have ventured."

"Hadn't you? but your news did astonish

me so! I was determined I would come to-night to see them with my own eyes. Mrs. Sydenham to walk in arm-in-arm with that proud Lady Norbury—most surprising! and Lady Anne to follow with my Lord Dorville. And then Lord Mordaunt and Miss Sydenham—and, bless me! there they are, just as you described; and what a stare that impudent Lord Mordaunt darts on me; but I don't care! not I! I can tell him, that he has my free leave to marry either Mrs. or Miss Sydenham, or both, if he pleases."

"And see," said Miss Bevil, "now they are going up to Madame de Wallestein, and they are shaking hands with Lord George Fitzallan, who has got Miss Louisa Mildmay on his arm; of course you know that match is announced too; three couples of lovers standing together in a corner; quite a hopeful sight for all the young ladies. I must tell the Lady Beaulieus to take example from what they see before them,

and lose no more time. Why, Lady Birmingham, what is your young lady about? I expected she too would have gone off before this."

And great B——, as her ladyship was called in the fine set, looked furiously angry, and fanned herself, and was quite in a fuss, and turned her head and called out Barbara, but no Barbara answered; and then she said with alarm, "Bless me! where's my Barbara?"

"There, quite safe on Lord Hare's arm, close to the Baroness and Miss Louisa. She is going to dance with Lord Hare."

"Oh!" said the mother, with a tone that seemed to say to the Bucannons' well-practised ear, "that might do as a *pis aller*, might not it?"

But the widow would not let it pass.

"Lord Hare is good-natured enough, to be sure, but sadly poor. I believe he has fourteen brothers and sisters. You know he is just come from Paris; and he met Lord Killarney at Amiens, and all that story about

Colonel Montague and the Italian lady, turns out to be nothing at all. This same lady is no other than the wife of Sir Edmund Montague; his brother and she have run off, it seems, with a Frenchman, and the child turns out to be this same Marquis's or Duke's, I forget which; and Lord Hare says Sir Edmund Montague is a dead man, in his opinion; so you see, after all, this very Lionel, when he gets the title, may turn out a very good match indeed; and they say he has got such credit for his behaviour to this thoughtless, extravagant brother, that he's quite a crack man, so esteemed and talked about!"

"I must own," said Lady Birmingham, "if he were to become Sir Lionel Montague, of Atherford Abbey, it would alter the case very much; and I really do believe Barbara will never marry any body else: indeed she has nearly told me so; she will not marry him without my consent, that she has positively promised; but it is on condition that we do not press her to take any body else; and though

she looks so very well to-night, because dressing has given her a fine bloom, you've no idea how thin she's grown of late, and she's lost all her gaiety. I really don't know, sometimes, what to make of her; and Sir Benjamin is teazing all day and every day, with questions of what ails her; he's sure she's in love, and she shall marry any man she likes, that he swears."

The dancing now began, and Lord George led out his blushing Louisa, for the last time. Miss Sydenham preferred flirting in the corner with Lord Mordaunt, because more people could look at them; and then she hung her head on one side, and looked sentimental, with her long ringlets, and lisped more than ever, and tried to be agitated, and fanned herself when any body begged to congratulate her, and then she would look up in Lord Mordant's face for help, and he, hard-hearted man, gave her none; but thought to himself, "before you have been my wife three weeks I will cure you of all that d——d affectation; it won't suit my Newmarket asso-

ciates:" and Lady Anne Norbury tired to death of listening to poor Lord Dorville's *platitudes*, which she had now endured a whole week, without any variety, proposed dancing. He was so happy that he jumped and capered like a boy, while she yawned languidly, and looked as if her thoughts were far away. She missed Killarney's wit and originality; and as she looked at the dull mortal who was soon to be her lord and master, she could have said, "I have certainly a pretty prospect before me." Lord Norbury had the pleasure of sitting all night by the well-dressed Mrs. Sydenham, and listening to her elegantly turned flattery which made the ball a vastly pleasant one to his lordship; and Lady Norbury was unusually happy in receiving every body's congratulations, and finding herself the head of so large a circle, she was the envy of all the matrons, so great in discussing favours, bride-cake, and wedding-clothes; all which troubles were coming thick upon her. Poor Lady Birmingham sat and yawned: she

was low and nervous, and out of spirits at finding herself disregarded, and of no consequence: her ball forgotten, as well as every thing else that concerned her: what so short-lived as fashionable notoriety—a three days' wonder: and she overheard Lady Hauton say to Colonel Leach, "Well, really Almack's is quite the temple of hymen to-night; I am delighted with all these matches. But what's the matter with your *protegée*, Miss Colonello, the rich heiress? I did my best for her ball you know, and yet you see, after all the pains we took, she don't go off, unless you feel disposed to take pity on her yourself, my dear Leach." And the Colonel bowed complacent y, with an air of ineffable conceit.

Lady Birmingham had for some time missed her daughter. She looked every where in the room for her, but she could not see her.—"Where can Barbara have hid herself," said she to Lady Eglantine V——.

"I saw Miss Birmingham not five minutes

ago, on the arm of a very handsome man; she was in deep conversation with him."

"Dear me! who could it be, I wonder?"

"It was the gentleman who came in just now, arm in arm with the Austrian ambassador, the Baron de Wallestein, and a little fat old man; I saw them all three go into the tea-room with your daughter."

Away trudged the anxious Lady Birmingham, as fast as her thick, rustling silk, and numerous blonde flounces would admit of. There were several parties in the tea-room, but no Barbara: full of anxiety, her ladyship next proceeded into the smaller dancing-room, to look there. The waltz had just ceased; there was a group of gentlemen standing before a lady, who was seated in the corner of one of the sofas, and when Lady Birmingham approached, she saw that it was indeed Barbara herself, and that with one hand she was holding her handkerchief to her eyes, and, the other, a tall, fine-looking young man was pressing to his lips; and her ladyship heard him

say, in a low voice, " My faithful Barbara! and now mine for ever."

Miss Birmingham replied; " Gain but my mother's consent, and there can be no further obstacle."

The other two gentlemen, were the Baron de Wallestein and Sir Benjamin Birmingham.

They had all their backs turned to the door, so that her ladyship came upon them quite unawares.

" Here she is, I declare!" said the Baronet; " come to give her consent just in proper time. Well! my lady, didn't I tell you, I 'd be shot if that dear girl of ours wasn't in love with some one or other, and now it comes out that she 's been as good as engaged ever since the election, to this gallant Colonel;" clapping Lionel on the back.

" Not engaged, papa," said Barbara; changing colour,—" only—"

"Oh! not engaged, only attached, I suppose?"

" Well! these gentlemen," continued Sir Benjamin; " called on me after you went out, and

told me all about it—and now my dear—your consent is all we want?"

"Mamma," said Barbara, with a voice trembling from emotion; "you will not surely refuse to make your child happy?" and she took her mother's hand: "Will you?"

"On my knees I must entreat you, then," said Lionel; "my whole study will be to prove myself worthy of such a treasure."

"Some one is coming," said the Baron. "Lady Birmingham will, I am sure, consent to please every body; look at the anxious countenances of these two young people: you cannot refuse them."

Her ladyship paused; she struggled hard between the feelings of the mother, and the wishes of the fine lady; but nature at last prevailed: she took hold of her daughter's hand, and placing it within Lionel's, she said with a steady voice, and an air of dignity, "Barbara is yours, Colonel Montague; and may you make her as happy as she deserves to be."

There was a moment's silence, for every body was affected; it was broken by Sir Benjamin, who exclaimed: "There now! may God bless you, my dear, for making us all comfortable."

"Amen!" said the Baron, and he added; "Now I must go and tell my ladies all this good news."

"Yes," said the Baronet; "let us have another happy couple or two, for I do dearly love to see merry faces; I say it's all the good money can do, to enable us to make others as happy as ourselves. And Montague, my boy, I must say my Barbara will make you as good a wife as any girl in the kingdom, for she's always been a dutiful, good girl, and that's a better prospect for you than any, wealth can give: yet harkye, my good fellow, she won't want for that either."

"She is a fortune in herself, sir;" was the lover's answer; as he looked fondly at his fair mistress; "and in giving me this lady, you have given me every thing I could wish for."

"But you can't live on love, sir; you don't

mean that, I hope? No, no! call on me to-morrow: for we shall have a deal to settle."

Poor Barbara! for a few moments, as she stood gazing on Colonel Montague, while he was still pressing her hand to his heart, she felt the happiest of human beings; and Lady Birmingham, as she looked upon them both, could not help owning that they would be a very handsome couple; but her daughter was soon overpowered and distressed with compliments and congratulations from all corners. First came Mrs. Bucannon, "It was just what she had predicted." Whatever happened in any way, the widow had always predicted it, always knew every bodies' destiny. "I thought it best to relent," said Lady Birmingham, "in an apologizing manner, to her.

"Oh! to be sure, and he'll be Sir Lionel Montague of Atherford Abbey, you'll see, before long, as sure as my name's Bucannon."*

* Mrs. Bucannon proved a true prophetess: long before the marriage could take place, Lord Killarney

Lady Norbury expressed herself upon the occasion with uncommon warmth of manner: she was really delighted. "A charming match, indeed! The Montagues are a most distinguished old family; he is a very fine young man, and Miss Birmingham can give him the only thing he wants." There was graciousness! she even condescended to take Lady Birmingham's hand, and wish her joy with great cordiality.

Louisa jumped with delight; "My dear love!" said Lord George; "every body is staring at you."

"Never mind! I wish them all as happy as we are at this moment; we only want my father and Julia to complete our party."

wrote to announce the death of Sir Edmund Montague. He fell in a duel, by the hand of the Duc de Belfort. By his death, Lionel succeeded to the baronetcy, as well as to the venerable old abbey and fine landed property. Lady Birmingham was, no doubt, infinitely better pleased with the alliance, when Barbara was certain of becoming Lady Montague.

"Pray don't forget Mrs. Penelope and her old admirer," said Lord Mordaunt; with one of his cold sneers.

"Good gracious!" said Laura Sydenham; "what strange ideas you have, Lord Mordaunt. After waiting so long, would you have them marry too."

"Not before us, my fair lady!" replied his lordship; trying to look tender, when he longed to box her ears for her folly.

"*Comme tout le monde est heureux!*" said the Baroness; with a smile to her husband "And when they have been married as long as we have," continued the lady, "may they, my dear Baron, be but as fondly attached as we are now."

"May the gentlemen find out, my beloved Caroline, what your pretty song tells us, and the truth of which I feel every day more and more.

"'How much the wife is dearer than the bride.'"

"I say, Lady Anne," said Lord Dorville; "you should tell the Baron none but lovers, like you and I, ever talk poetry as he is doing: it 's not the thing, at least in England, for old married people, is it? It 's only proper for lovers."

"Unless when poor lovers are very *prosy* like you and I, my lord," said her ladyship; with a sort of yawn. "What can they do then?"

"So you are all collected here, I declare!" said Lady Hauton, coming from the ball-room; "I couldn't, for the life of me, think where you could be flown to. Madame de Wallestein, all the patronesses are asking for you: the Duchess of Stavordale and Lady Plinlimmon, are so furious at a fourth match being announced to-night, that they want me to authorise a prohibition, against there ever being more than two marriages declared at any one ball, unless it should be a charity one; otherwise, as Lady Bellamont observes, we

shall really run short of desirable men to supply our list for ALMACK'S.——But we perceive we have actually reached the end of our Third Volume, and we have yet a very considerable portion of our materials positively untouched! What can we do in this dilemma, unless we promise to ourselves the pleasure of resuming our subject; when the scene may open on a more enlarged view of Almack's and its votaries, for many of whom we have not as yet been able, consistently with the plan we have hitherto pursued, even to find a place.

END OF THE THIRD VOLUME.

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